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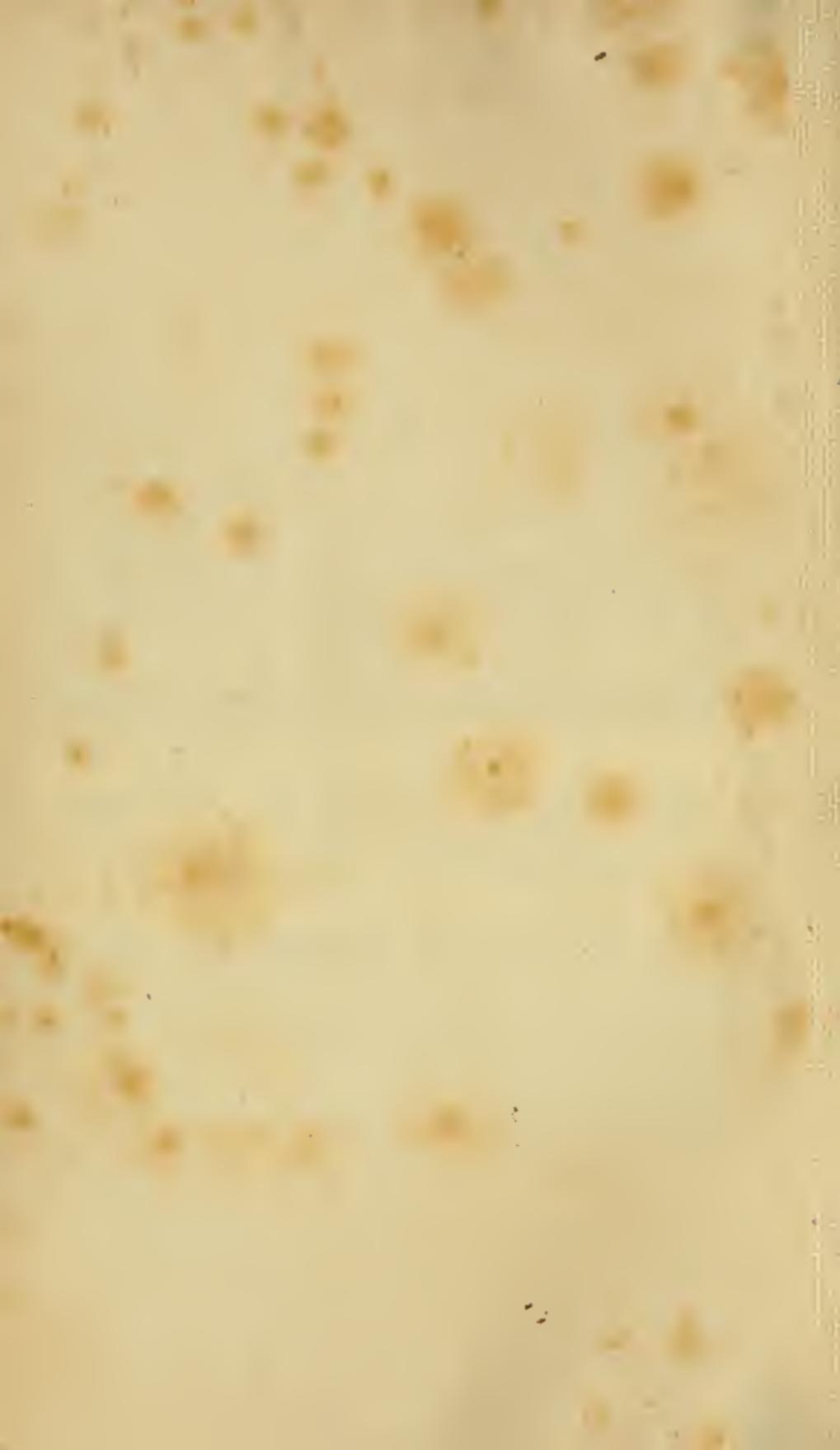
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Ellen W. Chambers



A REMEDY
FOR
WANDERING THOUGHTS
IN THE
WORSHIP OF GOD.

BY THE
REV. RICHARD STEELE, M. A.

"How canst thou say I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?"—Judges xvi. 15.

"With my whole heart have I sought thee, O let me not wander."—Psalm cxix. 10.



1835.

G. F. Hopkins & Son, Printers, 44 Nassau-street.



DEDICATION OF THIS WORK

TO THE

MOST HOLY TRINITY.

THESE first fruits I humbly lay at thy blessed footstool, O God, being ambitious of no patron but thyself; for thou alone canst attest the sincerity of my aim herein, which will plead with thee for the imbecilities thereof. Thou alone art the right author of every valuable line and word in this ensuing tract. The errors only are mine, but the honour is thine. Thou hast the strongest hand, and truest heart to protect both the writing and the writer from all the unkind usage that we may meet with. Thy approbation chiefly I humbly crave, and then I am sure to have all good men on my side. Against thee, thee only, have I offended by my distractions, and done these evils in thy sight; and therefore am bound to seek the destruction of them in all the world for thy sake. Thou hast so infinitely obliged the unworthy writer of these lines, that he rejoices in this opportunity to tell the world, *That there is none in heaven or earth to be compared to thee.* Thou only canst make my endeavours herein successful, and bring that to the heart which I could only present to the ear or eye. Unto thee,

therefore, do I dedicate both this and myself, with this earnest prayer, That this Essay may both please thee, and profit thy Church! That thou wouldest take this rod into thy hands, and therewith whip these buyers and sellers out of thy temple! That thy great name may hereby be magnified, though the writer's were never known! To thy heavenly blessing do I most humbly recommend this mean work, and worthless workman, with a resolution to remain, while I have any being,

Thine own,

RICHARD STEELE.

TO THE
SERIOUS READER,
ESPECIALLY THE FIRST HEARERS OF THE MATTER CON-
TAINED IN THIS BOOK.

CHRISTIAN READER:— You have here an antidote against the most common distemper of God's people, in his worship. My own disease caused me to study the cure; the general complaint of good people against these *Egyptian flies* moved me to preach it; and the common good of God's church, not without solicitations thereto, hath now persuaded me to publish it. Be not offended that so much is written on so minute a point; greater tracts on the fever, stone, or tooth-ache, whereby they may be certainly cured, would not be thought too long by such as are sick thereof. Indeed, this had never seen the light, but that the disease is so general, and that so few, if any, have thoroughly handled it. However, this may serve, as the learned lord Verulam hath it, “to awake better spirits, and to do the bell-ringer's office, who is first up to call others to church.” This being my first essay, riper judgements will, I believe, observe divers defects and superfluities therein; but candour is a common debt, which we all owe one to another, and one poor mite may be accepted by men, when two mites can please Christ himself. It is my request to you, especially, that were the first hearers hereof, that ye be not hearers or readers only,

but doers of the word. The world knows you have been *constant hearers*, let the world see that you are *careful doers*. The indubitable truths and duties that I have laid before you, will undoubtedly convert you, or else undoubtedly condemn you; and therefore I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For now I live if ye stand fast in the Lord. And my earnest request *for you* is, that divine power may accompany divine precepts. If you reap any benefit, let God have all the *praise*, and put the poor instrument into some corner of your *prayers*. I have chosen a dialect and phrase familiar for the advantage of the matter, rather than the applause of the writer, being contented to be ranked among those who regard the graces of style but as the secondary object of a good writer; you will excuse the unevenness of the style, and other imperfections, when you understand that I had more studies than books in composing hereof, being distant from my library, and variously distracted in the writing about distractions. But my aim being a solid cure, not a starched discourse, I have chosen a divinity dress, and *not preached myself*, who am the chief of sinners, *but Christ Jesus, my Lord*, and myself,

Your servant,

For Jesus' sake,

R. S.

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A REMEDY
FOR
WANDERING THOUGHTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TEXT EXPLAINED.—THE DOCTRINE PROPOSED, AND A DISTRACTION DESCRIBED.

SECTION I.

THE EXPLICATION OF THE TEXT.

That ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.—1 COR. vii. 35.

THE words of the text present us with a design that believers as often aim at, and yet miss, as any in the world; and which is so excellent and rare an attainment, that the Holy Ghost even makes two words on purpose to express it by, no where else found in the New Testament; “to attend on the Lord without distraction.”

I. THE MATTER WHAT, "ATTEND UPON THE LORD."

II. THE MANNER HOW, "WITHOUT DISTRACTION."

I. The matter what, "attend upon the Lord." The Greek word for "attend" in our copies, hath a remarkable elegancy in it.

1. That you may be *fit and ready* for God's service, that religion and religious duties may sit fitly on you, that you may be *ready* to serve the Lord in duty or suffering. A most sweet frame of soul to be always bent and strung for the service of God. That man is meet for the master's use, that is prepared unto every good work.

2 Tim. ii. 21. How many choice opportunities for instruction, for reproof, for charity, for prayer, do we hazard; yea, and lose, for want of a soul quick and ready to do our duty?

2. That you may be *fixed and settled* in his service. The word intimates such an inseparable cleaving, such a marriage of the mind to the work of God, that we have in hand, as can by no means suffer a divorce. It should be as hard a matter to break off the heart from God in his service, being married to him, and settled in holy duties, as it is to abstract the miser's soul from the world to which it is glued.

II. The manner how, “without distraction.” The sense hereof is almost perverted by the *emphasis* of the former word. Yet this word is not without its great weight: and it speaks a *quiet, unshaken, and immoveable* fraine of soul, which cannot be whirled about with vain trifles. The soul is never at that holy quiet, as when it is directly ascending and communing with the Lord; and therefore Satan exceedingly envies this celestial happiness of the saints, and if he cannot distract them *from* duty, be sure he will distract them in it; and this he doth very much by the world, and the business thereof. And therefore, saith the apostle, guide your condition so, in this suffering season, as that it may not misguide your hearts, in your attendance on the Lord; that you may not attend on yourselves, nor on others; but on Him who is the centre of an ordinance, and your all in all.

Take the sum of all in this assertion, the main doctrine from the text,—*It is a Christian’s duty to attend on the Lord without distractions.*

And that I may from this text and doctrine profitably handle the case, and endeavour the cure of distractions, I shall proceed to show these things.

1. The nature of a distraction. 2. The kinds of distractions. 3. That it is our duty to attend upon the Lord without distractions. 4. The reasons why we must attend on the Lord without distractions. 5. Answer the objections. 6. Describe the causes of distractions. 7. The evil of them. 8. The cure of them. 9. Propound some encouragements under the burden of distractions. 10. Draw some inferences from this doctrine.

And, First, of the nature of a distraction.

SECT. II.

A DISTRACTION DESCRIBED.

THE first head will be to describe a distraction. A distraction is a secret wandering of the heart from God, in some duty in hand.

1. *It is a wandering.* As the remissness of our devotion shoots short, so distraction shoots awry. 'Tis said, Prov. xxvii. 8, "As a bird that wandereth from his nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." It is commonly known, the ready way to destroy the young in the shell, is dis-

continuance of heat; and to wander from our heavenly work, produces the dead offspring of unprofitable duties. It would be almost as easy to trace and follow the bird in his vagaries, as the volatile and intricate imaginations of the heart. It is a digression;—you that are curious to observe the minister in his digressions, how much more necessary is it to observe your own?*

2. *It is secret*, in the heart. And this contracts the guilt and nature of hypocrisy upon a distraction; for we have a short and clear description of hypocrisy, which agrees too well with distractions, Matt. xv. 7, 8: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.” To have a bended knee, a craving eye, are choice *expressions* of duty; but without the *impressions* and attendance of the heart,† are double iniquity and flat hypocrisy. How empty would our con-

* The same Greek word signifies the soul, and a butterfly, because our wandering imaginations make our wavering spirits like butterflies, puffed up and down with every blast of vanity.—*Mr. Page.*

† In the sacrifices of the law, the inwards still were offered to God, the skin was for the priest.

gregations be sometimes, if no more bodies were present than there are souls? And what abundance of sorry service hath our God, that nobody sees.

Yet how unknown soever these triflings of the mind are to others, or to ourselves, yet are they most palpable to the Lord, who sets our most “secret sins in the light of his countenance;” Psalm xc. 8; and though these may seem small trifles, yet they fall under the rebuke of religion; and are as sinful as they are secret: good in secret is the best goodness; and secret sinfulness the worst sinfulness.

3. This wandering of the heart *is from God*, for God is the object of worship. “To pray aright is to pray before the Lord: Zech. vii. 21. “To give thanks aright is to give thanks before God:” Dan. vi. 10: not in his sight only, for so you are when your hearts are worst; but good men looked on God when they spake to him, as we look on men when we speak to them. Melancthon saith, he had heard Luther in his secret prayers, so pray, that one would verily think there were somebody in the room with him to whom he spake.

4. This wandering is while some duty is in hand. That was a good answer of Nehemiah to his false friends, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and come down to you?" Nehemiah vi. 3. He that is in a duty to God is about a very great work, and that work stands, or goes backward, every moment the heart is away; and why should a temporal* vanity set back, and perhaps quite unravel your eternal concernment? How will that Spartan youth rise up in judgement against us, that holding the censer during Alexander's heathen sacrifices, would not stir his hand from its duty, though the burning coals fell thereon, and made his flesh to fry and smell in the presence of all the spectators?

* When King Ethelbert was at his devotions, news was brought of the Danish invasion at Essenden, but he neither omitted nor abbreviated his prayers; he would hear no suit on earth, till he had made his requests in heaven, and afterwards he bravely vanquished them.—*Dr. T. Fuller.*

CHAPTER II.

THE KINDS OF DISTRACTIONS.

SECTION I.

THEIR SEVERAL FOUNTAINS.

OUR second duty will be to take a view of the kinds or sorts of distractions; and they are diversified: 1. From the fountain whence they flow. 2. From the matter whereof they consist. 3. From their adjuncts. For the first of them, you will find,

1. *Many of our distractions may justly be gathered on the Devil.* He is a spiritual substance, and is most properly conversant in spiritual sins; he is completely skilled in all thoughts whatsoever, and therefore what he imparts here is of his own. The high-priest Joshua could not be at his prayers for the Israel of God, but as Christ the angel of the covenant was on one hand, Satan was standing on the other, Zech. iii. 1, and he was got at the

readier hand,* the right hand, the hand of action, that he might hinder him more dexterously in his devotion. And when Satan stands on the right hand, the prayer is in danger to become sin. Psal. cix. 6, 7. When we are most serious before the Angel, the Devil is whispering at our elbow; and who can be dull and watchless, when God is on one hand, and Satan on the other?

The Devil is afraid of a serious lively prayer at his heart; he knows that can pull down in a minute what he hath been contriving for a thousand years; and therefore, if he cannot withhold us from holy duties, he will do his utmost to disturb us in them. Hence the vision of that holy man who in the whole market saw but one devil busy (for there Self was at hand, Satan had no need to bestir him;) but in the congregation there were multitudes of them: all their skill and power being little enough to ward off poor souls from Jesus Christ. Alas! we pray, and hear, and live as securely, as if there were no Devil at all.

* "A wise man's heart is at his right hand." Eccles. x. 2. i. e. His heart is ready and prepared to every good work.—*Annot. in loc.*

And his suggestions in religious duties are usually more violent and impetuous,* more dreadful and impious, than those which are of our own breeding; called therefore darts, and fiery darts of that wicked one. Though he lay these suggestions of his at thy door, yet they will be counted in the number of his sins and of thy afflictions.

2. *Our distractions proceed from the mind and understanding.* The vanity of the mind alienates us from the life of God, and from communion with him. When a present and seasonable petition or instruction is conveyed through the ear into the understanding, it wantonly plays therewith, and takes occasion to run out on some contiguous notion; and from that to another and at length rests and dwells on some alien and unseasonable point, till the gales of the good Spirit, and the present matter be overpast. And thus by a default in the understanding, we seek not God, Psal. liii. 2, nor find him as we might; and that excellent faculty, which would penetrate into the divine mysteries, and should guide the will and heart unto God, by the

* Joab could hinder David from weeping for Absalom, not from numbering the people, to which Satan stirred him up.—*D. Arrows.*

ignis fatuus of its unmortified vanity, misleads us from the chief good, and entangles us in distractions. We read “of a filthiness of the spirit,” 2 Cor. vii. 1, whereof surely this is a part, and must be cleansed in them that will “perfect holiness in the fear of God.”

3. *Some distractions proceed from the fancy*, a most busy faculty, which is most unruly and least sanctified in a holy man. Sometimes by the help of memory, stepping back into things past, she brings into the most solemn worship a thousand passages that are past and gone, and rolling them in the head, carries soul and all quite away from God: hence it is, you often hear them say, “such a thing came into my mind at sermon or prayer,” that was forgotten weeks or months before: yea, daring to re-act former sins by contemplative wickedness in the very sight of God, which doubles the guilt by repetition, and makes your former sins exceeding sinful. In this sense that is true, “Better is the sight of the eyes, than the wandering of desire;” Eccles. vi. 9; there is something more of evil in these second contemplations, than in the first commissions. Sometimes the fancy will create a world of figments or notions out of nothing, and multiply

impertinent thoughts upon no ground, and to no purpose ; and can sally out of the present matter to every adjacent business, and make a great ado to bring nothing to pass. “There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen,” Job xxvii. 8; the fancy can find out such a way ; thus God is not in all, hardly in any, of our thoughts, when we pretend to treat him with the greatest solemnity.

And sometimes the fancy breeds distractions by forecasting things to come ; so many a man can most easily, on the Sabbath, contrive his business for all the week after ; and the poor woman in the corner of a prayer order the business of all the house for a day. Hence many an affair is cursed in our hands, by our unhappy contrivance thereof in the time of worship. Thus we have some saying (in their hearts no doubt), “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn, and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?” Amos viii. 5. And it is well if they have no companions in this assembly, who are making their hay, measuring their corn, counting their coin, if not providing for their lusts, while they seem earnest with the Lord negotiating for eternity.

4. *Our distractions in God's worship are sometimes occasioned by our outward senses.* Most frequently by the eye ; a wandering eye mostly hath a wandering heart ; for when the eye discovers any new, pleasing, or ridiculous object, it presently brings news thereof unto the heart ; and that debates and studies upon it, to the grieving of God's Spirit, and cooling of our own : and when that is over, a fresh sight presents itself, and the eye is ready for that again, and leads the heart into a maze of follies. We read, " My eye affecteth my heart, because of all the daughters of the city," Lam. iii. 51, that is with grief for their calamity. There is a reciprocal working it seems ; the heart at first affects the eye, and the eye can affect the heart with grief : even in like manner, when the sons or daughters of the city enter the assembly, the eye affects the heart ; stirs, diverts, kindles the heart ; and the heart corrupts, stains, and transmits its follies by the eye ; the precious soul meanwhile suffering between them, and the holy God and his services being wofully slighted.

You resolve in this duty, I will not swerve from God, nor step aside into the least distraction ; but you bolt the door and let your enemy in at the win-

dow. The thoughts that are shut out at the street-door steal in at the back door, if you do not as well “make a covenant with your eyes, as keep your feet, when you enter into the house of God.” In this sense the woman and man also have need of the covering of a holy and constant watch, “because of the angels,” the wicked children of hell, that ride abroad in the air, to carry away our hearts from God.

SECT. II.

THE MATTER OF DISTRACTIONS.

SECONDLY : Distractions are distinguished by the matter whereof they consist ; which is sometimes

1. *Good.* It is Satan’s ambition and triumph, when he can affront God with his own matters ; as to bring in shreds of sermons in the heat of prayer ; and long passages which you have read, to keep out material points, that you should be hearing : he will hold your husband’s picture before you, while you should look on your husband’s face, and at length delude you with shadows instead of sub-

stance. A good thing in its nature, may become a bad thing in its use, when it is out of season. Jewels misplaced may grow worthless ; a diamond on the finger is an ornament, but in the bladder a torment ; and God dislikes his own things in the Devil's way, little less than the Devil's things themselves.

As when one is playing in concert, as Mr. White remarks, if we stay on any note, while they who play the other parts go on, that which at first made excellent harmony, becomes now harsh, and spoils the music : so those thoughts that were sweet and musical, while they were suitable and pertinent to thy prayer, become harsh by dwelling unseasonably upon them.

2. Sometimes our wanderings are made up of things *indifferent* in themselves ; and these things by mis-timing them, are debauched, and made very evil and offensive unto God. As to talk with, or to see a friend, is in itself indifferent ; but to perform this in the heat of harvest may be folly. There are a hundred harmless thoughts both of things and persons, which crowding into the sacred presence of God, and interposing between the soul and its Maker, while the matters of

eternity are debating and concluding, are a great offence, and deserve to be whipped, and posted and sent away.

3. The matter of them sometimes is absolutely *bad*, proud, wanton, malicious thoughts : blasphemous thoughts, as whether God is, when we are praying to him, and the like. Able to sink us at any time, but sins of a double dye in the worship of God ; because there the special and piercing eye of God is upon us : as thest therefore is penal in all places, by reason of its intrinsic evil, much more criminal is it before a judge in the court : even so are these thoughts guilty and base anywhere, but when they shall dare to intrude into the presence of the Judge of Heaven and Earth, as it were daring a jealous God, this is prodigious sin and greatly provokes him. So “They come unto me as the people cometh, and they sit before me as my people ; with their mouths they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.” Ezek. xxxiii. 31. What more sweet than a religious mouth ? What more bitter than a covetous heart ? Especially when the heart goeth out after covetousness, pursues and follows it in the sight of God. Oh, dreadful ! God is pursuing and

following the sinner with Christ and mercy in his arms, and the sinner the while, with his very heart, is going after sin. And thus that house which God calls “the house of prayer,” we make a den of lust, malice, covetousness, and sin.

SECT. III.

THE ADJUNCTS OF DISTRACTIONS.

THIRDLY: Distractions are distinguished by their adjuncts. For,

1. *Some are sudden.* As the church, “Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadab,” Cant. vi. 12; and happy is that soul that is so sweetly and suddenly carried after Jesus Christ. So sometimes our treacherous soul, before we know or are aware of it, makes us like those hasty chariots; which misery comes about through want of watchfulness, which like a porter should keep the door, and turn all stragglers away. A thought is a sudden motion, and by it we may quickly step into heaven or hell; now these thoughts do steal in so suddenly, that we fall to

muse how they came in, by what door they entered, and so are entangled in more distractions by tracing the former, and commit new errors by discovering the old.

But now other wanderings are more premeditated, and whereinto the soul falls more leisurely, and wallows therein, either of choice, or without much interruption ; and these have much more guilt and mischief in them.

2. Some distractions are *unwilling*.* When the heart like a good archer aims directly at communion with the Lord, Satan or his corruptions jog him at the elbow, and make him miss the mark. This indeed is a sad disappointment, for a noble soul to embrace the dunghill, instead of the Sun of Righteousness ; for a man to loose those sweet words and minutes which might be had with God ; it is a sad mischance indeed, but which is common with man, wherein if the soul cry out as the forced

* Of these Mr. Capel speaks thus : While thy prayer comes out of a spiritual habit of grace, and is set on work at first by an actual intention of the mind, a virtual intention may serve all along after, though there be some roving thoughts ; I say, may serve to make them current at the throne of grace, and in the court of conscience.

virgin, Deut. xxii. 27, it shall not be imputed to her, especially when there was neither previous provocation, nor subsequent consent. And this is the case of blasphemous thoughts, which are like lightning cast into a room, that carries horror, but springs from no cause thereof in the room; so these thoughts come in upon thee, amaze and terrify, surprise thee against thy will: but be of good comfort, neither leave off thy duties; for thy prayers will do thee more good than these can do thee harm, nor hasten from them to gratify Satan; for if God be not able to protect thee in the discharge of thy duty, it is time to think of another master; but complain of Satan to God, parley not with them, but divert thy thoughts, and cry to that God the more, whom he tempts thee to blaspheme.

But others are *willing* distractions, which are the ordinary effect of an unspiritual and unprepared heart: to such a heart the whole duty is a distraction; when a vain and earthly soul, like a truant scholar, keeps out of his master's sight from choice, and with content, and is any where better than at his lesson; what little rest would such a soul find in heaven? or what true delight can he take in the most holy presence of God above, that

can find no rest and sweetness in his presence below?

3. Again, some distractions are *long*, and do consist of a concatenation of vain thoughts, when they do lodge in the heart. The Lord still calling at the door, and saying, "How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?" These do much alter the complexion of the soul, and argue too deep a habit of vanity therein. It is a true saying, Though we cannot hinder the birds from flying over our heads, yet we may disturb their roosting or making nests in our hair. So, though we cannot well hinder the sudden suggestion of a vain thought, yet we may trouble its quiet resting in the soul. Yet such strange subtlety is there in us, that we can keep God absent from our hearts a long time, yea, even when we are employed in a prayer, and be tampering with the world or sin all the while, the soul never coming in till the amen of a prayer do awaken us.

But other distractions are but *short*, only a step out of the way, and in again, and the soul catcheth the faster hold of God. And, indeed, when the soul doth follow hard after God, as every one should do in his service, though it stumble, as it

often happens to the most earnest in the way, yet it recovers to its advantage, being more zealous after ; the fall of the former being like that of the swine, who lies still in her mire ; the fall of the latter, like the sheep that falling riseth, and runs the faster. And thus you have seen the several kinds of distractions, which was the second general head,

CHAPTER III.

TO ATTEND ON THE LORD WITHOUT DISTRACTION
IS OUR DUTY.

SECTION I.

THE POSSIBILITY OF IT.

IN the third place I shall prove, that to attend upon the Lord without distraction is our duty which will clearly follow by demonstrating, 1. The possibility of it; 2. The necessity of it.

First, *It is possible thus to serve our God.* The sluggard, it is true, finds a lion in his way to every duty, and nothing is possible, because nothing is welcome. — There is no duty so easy, but it is difficult to the negligent; none so hard, but it is easy through divine grace to the diligent. Perfection herein I assert not; but that we may attain it in the substance and sincerity thereof, is proved:

1. From the *precept of God.* The wise and merciful God commands nothing, but he finds or

makes it possible ; his commands are not snares, but rules, yea and helps. When a master commands, power and assistance wait not on his commands ; the servant's strength must perform the master's will : but here are the commands of a father, which when they outstrip his child's strength, are still accompanied with his own assistance ; and the chair which the weak child cannot bring in, he helps to fetch himself. Now behold the divine precept, "Serve him in truth with all your heart." 1 Sam. xii. 24. What truth is there, while we appear to serve the Lord, and indeed do not think upon him at all ! Or how is that with all the heart, while there is not half, nor any thereof many times ! While we can pray, and plot, and think, and look, and begin our devotion only at the end of the duty. Our merciful Father will not impose an impracticable law upon us. It may by accident become impossible, but it is not so in itself.

2. In regard of *the power of God* it is possible. Ours is the duty, but his is the strength. God and his servant can do any thing. When you look on a hard task, and your heart fails you, raise your eye of faith, and you will find God the strength of your heart ; "I can do all things through Christ that

strengthened me," Phil. iv. 13 : lo, here the omnipotency of a worm ! If all things, that is all my duty, then this among the rest. But you will say, This was an apostle, a person of great strength and grace : yet still the acts were from the man, but the strength was from Christ ; for the same person saith, " Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." 2 Cor. iii. 5. Who, though he be at the same time terrible out of his holy places, and darts his curses on them that do his work negligently, yet " the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power to his people, blessed be God." Psal. lxviii. 35. He gives, that is, he is ready to give it out ; but, alas ! his stock lies almost dead by him ; and few sue to him in good earnest. His power is at your service, and therefore serve yourselves of it.

3. In regard of *the promises of God*, this is possible. To every command there is a promise.* The command finds us work, the promise finds us strength. As to this, some think that clause in our

* Compare Deut. x. 16, with chap. xxx. 6 ; and so 1 John, ii. 27, 28.

magna charta, Ezek. xi. 19, of one heart, is intended this way; wherein the Lord promiseth an united heart to his servants. A hypocrite hath more hearts than one; a heart for his pleasures, a heart for his pride, here and there his affections are straggling; now saith God I will give one heart. There is another promise, "I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me;" Jer. xxxii. 40; neither in whole nor in part, unless the fault be in yourselves. Now these promises are amen in Christ, and do belong to every soul that is in Christ, who may claim and have the benefit of them.

4. Add hereunto *the experience* of many servants of God, who by a habit of holy watchfulness, have attained to considerable strength against these wanderings. Hope of relief makes many complain of their distractions, when fear of pride hinders them from divulging their attainments; and that which by the grace of God is possible for others, with the same grace is possible for you.

SECT. II.

THE NECESSITY OF IT.

SECONDLY, it is necessary, and therefore no doubt our duty, to attend on God without distractions. It not only may be done, but must be done. You will say, they are happy that can do it, but they may be safe enough that cannot; thus the heart and substance of religion is counted a high attainment but not a duty. I shall show therefore that this soul-attendance on the Lord is necessary.

1. *It is necessary to the essence or being of the duty.* As the soul is necessary to the being of a man, the body is no man, but a corpse without it; even so a solemn duty with a wandering heart, is but a corpse of a duty. “Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in the heavens.” Lam. iii. 41. The elevation of the hands signifies nothing, without lifting up the heart with them. If prayer be the lifting up of the heart, what are words without the heart? A man may spend the same time and the same words in a serious and in a heartless

duty, and yet the latter stand for nothing for want of intensesness and attention. “There is none that calleth on thy name because none stirreth up himself to take hold on thee.” Isaiah lxiv. 7. If a man come to the service of God, and do not excite and stir up his soul to exercise grace, as a man will blow a dull fire, his faith, zeal, and humility ; if he do not blow them up, but suffer his heart to run at random, the holy God counts all the rest as a cypher without a figure, it stands for nothing.

2. *It is necessary to comfort in the duty.* The service of God is a sweet pot of ointment of a most refreshing odour ; the gracious soul is refreshed therein as a bed of spices. Distractions are the dead flies, Eccles. x. 1, which dropping into this sweet ointment, cause it to send forth a noisome smell, displeasing to God and unpleasing to the soul. Where can the soul be better than with God ? what sweeter company than that which angels keep, or pleasanter employment than conversing in heaven ? But wandering thoughts arise, and like a black cloud quite hide the sweet beams of that Sun of Righteousness from the soul, and then your comfort is gone. The sweetness of music consists in its harmony ; when the strings

are out of tune, or untunably touched, it is but a harsh sound, there is no music: wandering thoughts are like strings out of tune, there is no music in that duty, the Holy Ghost goes away and likes it not; and the soul likes it not, is weary of it; there is no sweetness in that duty. It is a tried maxim, The more seriousness, the more sweetness; the nearer to God, the warmer and merrier is the soul, which inward comfort is some reward to the heart of a christian, when his particular suit is denied; so that “in keeping of God’s commandments there is a great reward.” The choicest of the Spirit’s sealing comforts are bestowed in the lively service of God.

3. *It is necessary to the prosperity of a duty.* “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Psal. lxvi. 8. In God’s service the soul should be regarding God alone. If I regard a corruption, instead of Christ, if when some vain object presents itself, I turn my back on God to treat with vanity, the Lord will not hear me, nor regard me. We read of the holy Hannah, that “she spake in her heart, only her lips moved not, her voice was not heard;” 1 Sam. i. 13; yet this wordless prayer did the business; lip-labour, if no

more, is but lost labour. The earnestness and labouring of the heart prevails. The Lord our God hath a book of remembrance for them that think on his name, while he turns the deaf ear to them that cry, Lord, Lord, and do not inwardly adore him. In short, thus saith the Lord God, "Every man," child or not child, "that setteth up his idols in his heart, and cometh to the prophet," or sits demurely before the preacher, "I the Lord will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols." Ezek. xiv. 4. He that sets his heart on vanity, vanity shall be his recompense; if he will not affect his own heart, he shall never affect mine. *He that withdraws his heart in asking, will find the Lord to withdraw his hand in giving what he asks.

4. *It is necessary to communion with Jesus Christ in a duty.* Which, though it be a paradox to unregenerate men, is the very business and next end of the worship of God; which, if you lose, that duty is lost. Jesus Christ calls, "O my dove, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy coun-

* As long as Moses held up his hand Israel prevailed, and no longer.

tenance is comely.” Cant. ii. 14. Now if, when he waits thus to be gracious, you wait not for his grace, nor watch for the blessed appearances of the Holy Ghost, you will lose that happiness, you will lose your labour, and at length your souls. How are you troubled, if you are abroad when some good customer comes to your shop: it troubles you when that is bestowed on another which was intended for you. O sirs, the Spirit of God is a good customer, and when he comes and you are away, you are absent to your loss; and therefore keep at home the next time.

How unmannerly would it be for the subject to knock at his prince’s chamber, and, knowing he is within, and waits for him, step away about some frivolous trifle when he hath done? The prince appears, opens his royal door, and calls; but the foolish man is gone. How fairly may he shut his door against such a guest, and make him wait in attendance long before he sees his face? Ah, how seldom do we see the face of God in an ordinance, or much endeavour to do so! “My soul followeth hard after thee,” or, as in the Hebrew, “is glued to thee.”—Psal. lxiii. 8. That soul, and that alone, that follows hard after God,

by the earnest intenseness of zeal and love, and which cannot be content without him, that heart shall cleave to him, and have rare communion with him.

Thus you may plainly see, that to attend upon the Lord without distraction is a duty, which was the third point to be handled.

CHAPTER IV.

REASONS WHY WE OUGHT TO ATTEND ON THE
LORD WITHOUT DISTRACTION.

SECTION I.

FROM THE NATURE OF GOD.

THE fourth point is to show the reasons for the doctrine and duty of attending on the Lord without distraction. And they are drawn, 1. From the nature of God. 2. From the nature of his worship. 3. From the nature of our condition. 4. From the nature of distractions.

The first reason is taken from the nature of God, each of his attributes plead for this, especially.

1. *The greatness of God.* The greater the personage, the greater the reverence, and the more solemn your attendance should be. Hence, Elihu cries, “ Teach us what we shall say to him, for

we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness.” — Job xxxvii. 19. It is a bold adventure to speak to him, what is it then to trifle with him? wilt thou speak to God, nay pray to God, and not so much as look that way when thou speakest to him? This is to put on him the robes and title of a king, and use him like a slave. A prince may converse with two or three of his servants at a time; but it is impudent for a servant to talk to two or three princes at a time. The great Jehovah can speak with thee, and a thousand more, and do all your errands at a time: but, alas, thou art too poor a worm to entertain the great Jehovah and other matters at once. We are his creatures. “Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker.” — Isa. xlv. 11. If a servant must not be frivolous before his master, when he is receiving his commands, who dares be so before his Maker, who can as easily reward or ruin us, as I can turn over a leaf in this Bible? This he himself gives for the reason of that dreadful curse upon the “deceiver, that having a male in his flock, offers to God a corrupt thing. For I am a great king saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.” — Mal. i.

14. Which of you will be thinking of your wives, or children, or business, when you are offering a petition to a great king, or run after feathers, when he is speaking his mind to you? Thou takest God to be such a one as thyself, or else thou wouldest never do it. Remember a great God must be worshipped with profound veneration, and the most serious affections. A man must worship God, as if he were in heaven; oh! if thou wert there among those myriads of saints and angels, with what care, and humility, and earnestness, wouldest thou pour out thy heart to him, or hear his words to thee.

2. *The holiness of God* is another reason, who is so sacred, that an unholy thought is abomination to him; most especially in his holy service. Who can by an eye of faith behold the “Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and his train filling the temple, and the seraphim crying one to another, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts,” Isa. vi. 1, 2, and suffer his heart to be ravished away with transitory toys in such a sacred presence? Are the seraphim amazed at his holiness, and we untransported? Their thoughts are continually terminated upon him, and

should ours be always flinching from him? The holy Lord of Hosts will not allow it. If you will not sanctify him, he will sanctify himself. If you that worship him will not bear witness, by your serious attendance to his holiness, he must bear witness to it by his judgements on you; which, indeed, are not always visible, but ever certain; not a man in the congregation but the holy God is sanctified by him, or upon him. Little do we know what invisible dreadful effects there are of this daily in our congregations. And, if our dear Redeemer did not stand as a screen between us and his wrath, the best of us would quickly feel the effects of his displeasure.

3. *The omniscience of God* is a valid reason against distractions. "All things are naked and opened to him with whom we have to do," Heb. iv. 13; not only naked on the outside of us, but cut up and anatomized in the inside. That sharp and piercing eye looks through and through us, and neither doth nor can look beside us. Whither can I go from thy spirit? and whither can I flee from thy presence? Shall the husband fix his eye on his wife, and she, meanwhile, dart her glances on her paramour? Is this reasonable, or tolera-

ble? Get out of his sight, and trifle on. Steal into some corner where he sees you not, and be truants, and spare not. Be but an eye-servant to God, and we will ask no more. Be serious while he sees you; dally not while he holds you the candle. A curious eye requires a careful servant.

Object. But this is spoken with great freedom. I see no one but the minister and the people; seeing is believing: I know no one that seeth me.

Answ. 1. No more dost thou see that faculty by which thou seest. Is there, therefore, no such faculty? Are there no spirits, because thou never sawest them? When did you see the wind? and yet you doubt not of it. Nay, hath not he declared to thee, what is thy thought, Amos iv. 13, in many a sermon?

2. There is another eye by which God's presence in his ordinances is seen, which thou hast not. That is an eye of faith which, if fixed in thy heart, would quickly make thee cry, "How dreadful is this place! This is no other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven!" If an hundred credible persons affirmed they saw a great man in the congregation, you would believe them, though not seen by you, and would conclude

it your own inadvertency. Hundreds there daily are that do avouch they saw, felt, heard, embraced, the gracious presence of God, and therefore conclude it was your blindness, not on account of his distance, that you saw him not.

SECT. II.

FROM THE NATURE OF HIS WORSHIP.

THE second reason is taken from the nature of his worship.

1. It is *reasonable worship*; not only consonant to the rules of reason, and backed by the most rational principles, but must be managed as a rational act. Now it is a most irrational thing to converse with God without a heart; this is a silly thing, as “Ephraim is called a silly dove, without heart.” Hos. vii. 11. A dove without spirit, and a silly dove without reason or judgement. God had rather hear the roaring of a lion, than a heartless prayer; he delights more in the chirping of birds, than in singing of psalms without understanding; for these do what they can, and so are

accepted ; but brutish service from a reasonable creature is intolerable. Is it* reasonable that you should cry out for the Spirit, and think on the flesh? be hearing about another world, and ruminating on this? your eyes directed to heaven, and your heart in the ends of the earth? the tongue busy, and the soul idle? the knee devout, and the thoughts loose? there is no coherence, no reason in this. When ye work, work ; and when ye pray, pray ; and do it with understanding. “What is it then! I will pray with the spirit, and will pray with the understanding also ; I will sing with the spirit, and will sing with the understanding also.”

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

Consider, that else thou art as a madman before God, and God hath no need of madmen ; if one should come to thee about business of life and death, and after a word or two therein should run from one impertinent thing to another, would you not think him mad ? If thy thoughts were put into

* The Egyptians chose among all fruits the peach to offer to their gods, because the fruit is like a man's heart, the leaf like his tongue ; the heart and tongue should go together.

words and mingled with thy prayers, what strange mad prayers would they be ?

2. It is *spiritual worship*, and therefore you may not be distracted in it. “The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” Job iv. 23, 24. Others may seek to worship the Father, but the Father seeketh such to worship him who worship in spirit and in truth; in spirit, and so not like the formal Jews; in truth, and so not like the ignorant gentiles. And then, verse 24, “God is a spirit, and must be worshipped.” Here is must and shall, and reason for it. As a spirit can do nothing at eating, so a carcass can do nothing at praying. The most elegant tongues on earth cannot make one effort at prayer; no, the soul must be in it, and the soul must be busy too. If we had only an idol to serve, the body were enough; but God is a spirit, and cannot be conversed with without the spirit, yea, and the whole spirit also. Fond man, that thinks with his narrow soul to deal with God and somewhat else, who alone is immense, and beyond our greatest capacity! He must be taken up, and go out of the world in a sense, that will get into heaven.

The soul on the lip, and the soul in the ear, do perform work in the service of God.

3. It is *sweet work*. “Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.” Psal. cxxxviii. 5. Mark, shall *sing*:— their spirits shall neither droop nor step aside. He that attends on the Lord hath a most sweet employment; now the mind useth not to object to delightful music, or to dislike an enchanting song. O the gracious presence of God! his sweet smiles! and blessed love-tokens, that can transport angels, sure they may engage the heart of man, and sufficiently fill it.

Read the Canticles, and say then, Is not converse with God a heaven upon earth? and how far is heaven from distracted thoughts? Sad and severe things afflict the mind; it would flit from such subjects, but sweet employment engages all the heart; next to dwelling in heaven, is the soul flying to heaven in an ordinance; our driest duties yield us least comfort; the nearer the sun the warmer. More close to God more sweet you will find him, and never more “joyful than in the house of prayer.”

SECT. III.

FROM THE NATURE OF OUR CONDITION.

THE third reason is taken from the nature of our condition, and that is this :

1. *We cannot live without God.* In him we live as to our natural life; every breath is fetched from him; so in our spiritual life, the life of the soul is He who made it. A world without a sun is dark; a body without a soul is dead; but a soul without God is dark, is dead, is damned. It is true, men feed, and sing, and exist without God in the world, but he that lives truly, lives by faith; the other life beasts live; they eat, and drink, and work, but know not God; but if you will define the life of a soul, God must be in the beginning, in the midst, and in the end of it.

3. *Our only way of communion with God is in an ordinance.* This is the river, the streams whereof make glad the heart. Were a city besieged by mortal enemies round about, and no relief to be conveyed but by the river that waters it, how fatal to the inhabitants would the stopping of

that river be ; that city must starve or yield ; the ordinary supplies that a Christian cannot be without, come swimming down from heaven through the ordinances of God ; distractions stop the river, hinder prayer from ascending to God, prevent instruction from descending into the heart, intercept commerce and starve the soul. The zeal of the Jews was eminent this way, of whom Josephus relates, that when Pompey's soldiers shot at the thickest of them in the siege of Jerusalem, yet amidst those arrows did they go and perform their rites, as though there had been peace. Why, thy prayer is thy ambassador ; distractions cut off the feet, and “ he that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool, cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage.” Prov. xxvi. 6. A wandering prayer is a message by the hand of a fool, and that man is like to drink damage that useth it. A man is a poor thing without God, and God is not ordinarily met with but in an ordinance.

3. *All our strength and heart is too little for this business.* All our understanding too little to apprehend his rare perfections ; all our affections too weak and shallow to love, embrace, and delight in him ; hence we are obliged to love and

so to serve the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength. Mark xii. 33. That is with every faculty of the soul, and with the utmost strength of every faculty. Now if it be hard enough to climb the hill unto God with wings, how shall we ascend with these weights about us, or think to please with half a heart, when the whole is too little? for "he is a great King, and his name is dreadful among the heathen;" when all the water in the pool will but turn the mill, that miller is very foolish who by twenty channels lets out the water otherways. The intense and earnest heart is little enough to converse with God, all the water in our pool will but turn the mill. What then can the negligent heart bring to pass, and how unlikely are we to obtain with the great God with the negligent approaches of a trivial spirit, with only a part of a little heart?

SECT. IV.

FROM THE NATURE OF DISTRACTIONS.

THE fourth reason is taken from the nature of distractions.

1. *They divide the heart and disable it wholly.*

Now a divided heart can do nothing at all ; “their heart is divided, now shall they be found faulty.”

Hos. x. 2. If one heart divided from another make a fault, much more faulty is one heart divided within itself. Hence it comes to pass that Satan offers, as the false mother did about the living child : “Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.” 1 Kings iii. 26. If he cannot block your way to the presence of God, and make good his claim to the living child, as she would have done, then, with might and main, he promotes all imaginable diversions to part the soul, and cries, Lord, let it be neither thine nor mine, but divide it; well knowing, that as the child, so the heart while entire is a living and lively heart, but divide it and destroy it; as he that runs at once after two hares, catches neither, so the pursuit of two

objects at once spoils both. He that thinks to treat the Creator and the creature at the same time, enjoys neither of them; and thus the vain heart of man by overdoing, undoes itself, and reaching at two matters, spoils them both.

2. *These distractions frustrate the ordinance,* and cause the great name of God to be taken in vain. Instead of forcing the heavens, these do but beat the air, and cannot reach the heart of God, because they never reach your own. And this is one of the follies of a roving heart, that it consumes as much time in a senseless as in a serious duty, and yet doth nothing in it, brings nothing to pass. And so the holy God stands over the heedless sinner with Job's words, "When shall vain words have an end?" Job xvi. 3. I am weary with this tinkling cymbal; either pray in earnest, or pray not at all; hear in earnest, or hear not at all; as good not at all as never the better. The service of God requires a man, not a shadow; yea, all a man, and more than a man, our spirits and God's spirit also. Those that tremble at the profane man's taking God's name in vain, should make a conscience, lest they do it themselves,

lest they be damned for their oaths, and you for your prayers; because you wrong God's majesty under the pretence of serving him, and so affront him with more solemnity.

3. *They contract more sin upon the soul.* We read "that Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord." Levit. x. 1. And the Lord took it in high displeasure, "and with strange fire consumed them." Sins of ordinances are often extraordinary sins; as sacrilege is a greater sin than plain theft, because it is a purloining of what is consecrated; so a sin in worship hath this aggravation, and that it is in a place, and presence, and business, that is set apart for communion with God. Hence it comes to pass, that many of God's children have had grievous pangs and terror of conscience on their death-bed for ordinance sins. He that should be cleansing himself from his sins, and instead of that increases them, makes his sin exceeding sinful. Oh, what need then have we to pray, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way." Psal. cxix. 39.

And these are some of the reasons that confirm and enforce this practical doctrine, that we should "attend upon the Lord without distractions," and so you have the fourth general head.

CHAPTER V.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

SECTION I.

ITS IMPOSSIBILITY.

BUT because there is no duty so clear that our sinful hearts will embrace, if any show of contradiction can be produced, I shall wipe away all possible objections against this duty, which is the fifth general head to be handled.

Object 1. *It is impossible* thus to attend on God without distractions. Such is the variety of objects, such the imbecility of our nature, such the weakness of our graces, such the suddenness and swiftness of a thought, that none but angels can do this. You press that which is impracticable; it can never be.

Answe. 1. Though this objection hath been replied to before, yet seeing it recurs again, I answer,

1. Perfection herein is impossible in this life; not but that a prayer or other ordinance may be

attended with that intensioness, as to exclude every wandering thought that would step in ; but to be perfectly free in every duty from them, is rather to be wished than hoped for in this life. That angelic perfection is reserved for heaven ; this evangelical perfection may be here attained, which is the prevalence of grace against them : and not only a will, but a watch and an endeavour to be utterly rid of them.

2. And in this sense, there is no divine precept impossible : though our Lord Jesus saith, “ Without me ye can do nothing,” John xv. 5, yet the apostle asserts, “ I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.” Phil. iv. 13. If all things, then why not this ? - though it were impossible in itself, yet is it possible with God’s help ; we are prone to think that we can compass easy things by our own strength, and that difficult things are too hard for God. Have you ever tried to the utmost what God and you can do ? could not you have heard a sermon better if a naked sword had been suspended by a single hair over your bare heads ; and have prayed more cordially if you had seen every word you uttered, written down by the hand of God ? The same circumspection that keeps a

distraction out of one sentence, might, were you faithful therein, keep it out of two, or ten, or twenty; and he that can be temperate for a day, might be temperate every day, if he did his best.

3. It is a mixture of cowardice and sloth which makes its impossible. It is an argument of a slothful heart to say, “There is a lion in the way, there is a lion in the streets,” Prov. xxvi. 13; yet if there were a lion in the way to heaven, thou must rather run upon him than run from God. There is a more powerful lion will meet you in the way to hell. No, no; it is not the danger without, but the dulness and slothfulness within, that creates the impossibility. How many hundreds out of fearfulness and idleness, have restrained prayer before God; till being soundly awakened they set about prayer, and found it both pleasing and delightful? Religion, in the power of it, is a work of pains. If you will not make an effort for heaven, you can never have it; try but the next duty with your best diligence, and you shall find that possible to the power of grace, which appears impossible to the strength of nature.

SECT. II.

ITS DIFFICULTY.

Object. 2. *It is difficult:* if it be not impossible, yet it is very hard, it is a lesson for the upper class in the school of Jesus Christ. We weaker scholars need not attempt it, because we cannot attain it; as well may we sit still, as rise up and fall. This is too hard for us.

Answ. 1. This argues the excellency of it; the more hard the more honourable, and therefore this should rather increase than lessen thy courage. If you except all hard points out of the practice of piety, you will leave but few to be practised; it is the idle scholar who skips over the hardest words of his lesson, but the rod must fetch him back unto them: neither must you expect that God will take any notice of your easy duties, if you turn off the hard; he could have servants enough to do his easy work, but religion must go all together, and *almost* christianity will not serve any good purpose.

2. The way to heaven is hard, and this you were

told at first: "because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life." Matt. vii. 14. If you like it not, let it alone, but take care that you exchange for the better. To get a kingdom is not easy, though it is easy to lose one. Who gets a race without running; or victory without bleeding, or heaven without striving? Hence Mr. Latimer said to one that objected against the duty he was pressing, which was that landlords should send for their tenants and end differences among them; that this were a good work indeed, but marvellously hard. "O," said he, "my friend, it is a hard matter to be a Christian. Heaven was never gotten yet without violence, and there is no new way found of coming there. But if Christ Jesus had not done harder work than this for thee, thou couldest never have come there."

3. And is there no hardship in attending upon sin? Is it an easy thing to serve the devil? Wise Solomon saith, "the way of transgressors is hard." Prov. xiii. 15. Our love to it blinds our eyes, or else he performs a hard service that gives attendance on any sin. The lascivious man swallows many difficulties, perhaps weeks and months together, to continue the pleasure of an hour.

How many dark nights doth the drunkard walk, and hard words endure, and hard sacrifices make, to feed that senseless lust? Who would digest the life of a covetous worldling? Hard fare, hard work, hard journeys, for what may be consumed in two hours; to say nothing of the life of the envious, the ambitious, the malicious men, whose daily bread is mingled not only with sweet, but gall and bitterness; and yet who hears them complain of difficulty, or throw off their designs for hardness? And is it not far better to conquer difficulties for heaven than hell, and venture upon hardship for Christ and thine own soul, than for Satan and thy damnation? especially when love to the service of God would make this yoke as easy, as the labour of transgressors is to them.

4. Though it be hard to keep off these distractions, yet it is necessary, and it must be done. Good Mary would not by any business be distracted in her attendance on Christ, and resolves therein, that she did the "one needful thing." Luke x. 42. Poor men find it hard to work six days together, but there being a necessity for it, there is no excuse; they could find twenty put offs, but it must be done, work or starve. We

have the same dilemma, pray or perish ; and that is not half a prayer that is filled with distractions.

5. Though it be hard, yet it is sweet ; "her ways are ways of pleasantness," Prov. iii. 17, and this is one of them. You may ever observe the more wandering the heart, the more wearisome the duty ; a divided heart can taste but partial comfort ; and fulness of joy follows, where the full bent of the soul goes before. Our common experience tells us, what peace, what joy, what confidence, what suavity, fills the heart, when we have, though with some difficulty, approached the Lord, enjoyed him, and attended on him without distraction. What is more hard to the brain and the body than study ? for labour, a scholar would choose the plough before it ; the brain, the back, the heart and spirits are pained and spent ; yet no employment so sweet ; the mind, and brain and heart refreshed ; and a good scholar would hardly exchange employments with a prince ; so sweet, so ravishing is this hard employment. Even so it is with prayer or any holy ordinance ; the sweetness of a watchful serious frame, doth fully compensate for the difficulty thereof.

6. Custom and practice will make it much

easier. He that executes the law on vagrants, though at first he were pestered with them, will after a while with ease be delivered of them: so that resolved christian, who keeps up his watch and ward awhile, shall find it each day easier than the former one, to attend on God without these vagrant thoughts. Use and custom make the hardest things easy. As a wise man that converses in the midst of his observing enemies, by use is inured to all caution, and can easily avoid all dangerous words or behaviour; though it be hard, he is used to it; so practice will wonderfully facilitate this hard duty. You once thought it impossible for you to pray, but practice hath made you perfect. The same spirit, by the same help, can and will perfect you in this. This is one of those infirmities which the spirit of God will help.

SECT. III.

THE COMMONNESS OF DISTRACTIONS.

Object. 3. THE commonness of these distractions; no man but is full of them, all serious

christians complain of them. What is so common cannot be very evil ; these vanities that every one hath, I cannot expect to be without, and therefore must be content.

Answ. 1. This must be answered with grief. Every man is full of them, and every good man is sick with them. If every man's body were gone after his soul, this would sometimes be an empty congregation. Every solemn look hath not a serious heart, and there are but few that make a business of prayer ; and this is a lamentable thing, that we can hold discourse with man, or crave a kindness, or drive a bargain without a wandering thought ; till our face be set towards God, and that we begin a duty of worship, and then or ever we are aware, our soul is slipt off her chariot wheels, and our sight of God is lost.

2. And yet some watchful christians, as we observed before, have got a good riddance of them ; to accuse others is a poor excuse to you. As their humility teaches them to complain of the worst, so your charity should cause you to think the best ; no doubt they that are sick of them, do by degrees get remedies against them, and grow better.

3. By this plea all sins might be justified ; thus swearing might be advanced before praying, for it is more common than prayers ; revenge is more common than forgiveness, but this is no excuse for it. He that will do as the most do, must go whither the most go ; " thou shall not follow a multitude to do evil," Exod. xxiii. 2 ; no, nor to think evil. If thou wilt be Christ's disciple, thou must be serious and attentive, though the whole congregation trifle. True sanctity is not grounded on men's practice but on God's precept. Make no apologies but such as you can plead before the face of God. What a poor plea will it be to say, I was drunk for company, I wandered from God for company. Alas, if thou goest to hell for company, that will be no mitigation of your pain, nor an extenuation of your crime. If many displease the Lord, you have more need to please him ; if many play, you have more need to work ; and rather choose to be saved with a few, than be damned with a crowd.

4. In such an universal loitering, thy care will be more acceptable ; loyalty is doubly valued and rewarded, where rebellion is general ; and one dutiful child is cherished among many disobedient. " To this man will I look, to him that is of a poor

and contrite heart, and who trembleth at my word." Isaiah lxvi. 2. The great Jehovah there overlooks heaven and earth, and the house of his rest, to fix his blessed eye on this man or woman, that when he comes to a sermon doth not, dare not trifle, but trembles at his word, and that feels every sentence at his heart. When great men come into the congregation, then men look; but when the poor trembling hearer comes in, then God looks. The angels gaze at such guests, more than vain people do at silks and fashions. Oh it is a rare sight to see a christian in earnest, to behold a humble man converse with God; the hosts of heaven rise up, and are attracted by it. If therefore it be so common to be distracted in duties, do thou disdain to be in the common fashion, but get quickly into the mode of heaven.

SECT. IV.

GOD'S ACCEPTING THE WILL FOR THE DEED.

Object. 4. God will accept the will for the deed. I would be free from these temptations, but in this

life I cannot, and therefore shall sit down content. God is merciful, though you are strict. And he hath said, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." 2 Cor. viii. 12.

Answ. 1. This axiom and scripture were never intended as a pillow for the lazy, but as a support to the weary; not to exempt us from our duty, but to comfort us under our weakness. What parent will accept this answer from a negligent child? or what master will be content with this excuse from a slothful servant? Offer it now to your governor, and imagine not that will pass with God, which would be counted a mockery with men.

2. God never accepts the will for the deed, when the deed may be done; yea, and so far as the deed can be done, the will without it is but a mockery unto God. But wherein an upright heart hath done its utmost in the use of all means, and would do more, this will is accepted for the deed, even as if thou hadst perfectly obeyed: and so that scripture cited is express in the case of charity; "It is accepted according to that a man hath." So that a man must give according to that he hath, or else his willing mind stands for

nothing. Now have you done your utmost against distractions? can you do no more? If death stood at the end of the duty, you could double your watch! Plead not this till you have done your best.

3. It is far from the quality of grace, to sit down content in any defect or sin, or to vouch the mercy of God to secure the soul in any transgression: who when he is dressed in his garments of mercy, "Yet will not by any means clear the guilty." Exod. xxiv. 7. No, it is the genius of true grace, though it fall still upon him, and cry out and roar under those diseases that are incurable. After the Apostle had told us, "The good I would, I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do," Rom. vii. 19, he lies not down, and resolves to let it run, but fights and strives, and cries, "O wretched man that I am," verse 24. If thou once sit down, be content, and say, I will strive no more, thou givest the field, the Spirit withdraws with grief, and Satan approaches thee with triumph.

4. The great Jehovah is so far from being content with such a frame, that he hath plainly "cursed all such as do the work of the Lord

negligently, or deceitfully." Jer. xlviij. 10. Though you neglect not the work of the Lord, yet if you do it negligently, you are in danger of the curse. Every distraction is a neglect; in each wandering you deal deceitfully with God; and for every one of these in a duty, God's law pronounceth a curse. And is the divine curse a small thing with you? Who could digest a hundred curses, though pronounced at your door by a provoked neighbour? O how much more intolerable is it, to be obnoxious to a hundred curses from heaven, justly deserved, and infallibly inflicted, if repentance prevent not! It is not the work of the Lord will excuse you; Nadab shall perish with his strange fire, as well as if he had offered nothing at all. Take heed of forgiving yourselves, when God forgives you not: a negligent duty is abomination to God.

And thus you have the most material objections answered, which was the fifth point to be handled.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAUSES OF DISTRACTIONS, WITH THEIR
REMEDIES.

SECTION I.

SECRET ATHEISM.

WE shall now proceed unto the more practical part of this subject, namely, to find out and sum up the causes of this epidemical disease, which is the sixth point to be discussed.

The first cause of distraction in God's service is, secret atheism. There is an atheism of the head, an atheism of the heart, and an atheism of the life. In the first, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." Psalm xiv. 1. Mark, it is not, he hath thought in his heart, but says it by rote to himself, rather as what he would have, than

what he doth believe. And of him it is truly said, that the speculative atheist is the greatest monster in the world, except the practical. And our divisions in the church, by the help of our corrupt natures, have made proselytes of a considerable number to this desperate opinion: as if the different opinions about the ebbing and flowing of the sea, should render it doubtful whether the sea did ebb and flow at all; or the disputes about the manner of vision should call our sight itself into question. You would think it a vain conclusion to arrive at, because philosophers argue much about the sensitive and vegetative faculties of the soul, that there is no rational soul at all; inasmuch as these very debates do argue a rational soul, by which these points are disputed. Even so it is notorious madness to conclude, from the variety and diversity of opinions about religion and government, that there is no God; seeing you are supported by him, while you dispute and argue about him.

Atheism of the heart is that whereby the fool saith “also in his heart, There is no God;” that is, either secretly questions, or but coldly assents to the existence of God, or heartily wishes there

were none at all. And it is worth observation of both these, that they are such as are obnoxious to the divine majesty by some misdemeanour. The felon wishes there were no judge at all; yet even these are forced in some pangs to acknowledge him; at some fright by thunder, under some horror of conscience, or at the point of death, they are compelled to give Jehovah his due. And they also, in any sudden fright, or great extremity, usually cry to God as earnestly as others.

Atheism of the life is described,—“They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.” Titus i. 14. Now these latter originate from the first, and the last is most visible in our distractions: for if thou didst as verily believe God present in an ordinance, as he that sits next thee, durst thou trifle so egregiously as thou dost? The minister looks at you, and you dare not talk; if you saw him that looks at you from heaven, you durst not wander: and therefore the more or less strong our belief is of God, the more or less lively are we in our applications to him. Oh the patience of God! that he can endure the worm to doubt of his existence, yea, practically to deny him, and not demonstrate himself by a thunderbolt! But the

countryman's ignorance of the first moving cause doth not nullify it: no more doth the atheist's infidelity degrade the first mover, the Majesty of Heaven. "He that cometh unto God must believe that he is." Heb. xi. 6.

The remedy of this evil is, humbly to read the scripture, which is the most clear, certain, and convincing way to work faith herein. Prayer and the Bible have convinced more than any other arguments; recommend me, then, to Moses, rather than Plato, for the demonstration of a Deity. All that reason can suggest, might be written by an infidel; and more infidels have been convinced by reading and hearing the books of the christians, than christians settled by reading the books of infidels. And therefore, although holy David, Psalm xix. 1, appeals to the heavens, and the host of them, as a strong argument to declare God, and so it is; for what reason but the hand of a God, can be rendered, that the planets being all of one matter, should have contrary motions, seeing things of the like matter have by nature like motion? yet, laying that topic aside, he fixes upon the law of God, verse 7, as the most perfect and sure way to demonstrate a Deity, and convert and make wise

the soul. Then go to God in prayer, and beg him to touch thy heart, and open thine eyes, and thou shalt quickly see him “that is not far from every one of us.”

SECT. II.

THE CORRUPTION OF OUR NATURE.

THE second cause of distractions in the service of God is, the corruption of our nature ; that is, of soul and body ; so that our inward faculties do act on our outward senses, and they infect our inward faculties in this business. “Out of the heart proceed vain and evil thoughts.” Matt. xv. 19. They are not forced out, as sparks from a flint, but come out thence of themselves, as sparks out of a furnace. View the mind, and its accident is vanity ; and how can a vain mind be serious with God, without a great deal of grace ? The heart’s name is *deceitful*, and makes a trade of deceiving and purloining in the most solemn duties ; and when the ear receives the word as a lovely song, she runs after covetousness the while. “Now is she

without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner," like the lewd woman. Prov. vii. 11. The eye that should be fixed on heaven, is in the ends of the earth, and gathering a straggling notion from every object. The ear, by every noise, calls off the soul from its great business, thus woefully the old man is bent against the new man. "The law of the members wars against the law of the mind, and leads us into captivity to the law of sin that is in the members." Rom. vii. 23. When the mind itself is set in its most hearty purposes to wait on God, and offer him a faithful sacrifice, then comes in the law of the members, and either suggests within, or admits from without, some roving notions, and these lead the poor soul like that young man, "Forced with flatteries, like the ox to the slaughter, or the fool to the correction of the stocks." Prov. vii. 21, 22. And thus he that began in heaven, ends on earth, if not in hell. Thus the good he would do, he cannot perform. O wretched man, who must lead his life with such a heart!

As if a man were tied still to shoot in a warping bow; he settles himself in his right postures, aims directly at the white, but his warping bow still

carries the arrow quite beside the mark, and his skill is rendered ineffectual. So the poor upright christian in a duty, orders his business and his heart, as well as ever he can, and aims at glorifying God, and getting good to his soul ; but the corruption of his nature diverts him from his purpose. This hinders the elevation of the soul, which would fix it in God's service, like one that hath a light heart, and a heavy body ; the light heart would fly, the heavy body clips her wings, and will hardly creep. Oh ! saith the soul, now will I arise, and soar into heaven ; I must, I will speak with my God : my wants are pressing, my sins increase, eternity approaches ; who will give me the wings of an eagle ? I will never live so far from God, I will hasten away. Thus this bird of paradise takes wing, when behold the stone of her corrupt nature hangs at her leg, and weighs her down : she flutters a little, but cannot fly, because of the heart she cannot fly.

And not only dulness, but the deceitfulness of our corrupt nature furthers our distractions. For though the heart be deceitful from the beginning to the end of the year, yet her prime and most subtle sleights are showed in the service of God ;

where she is put hard to it to manage for herself, and therefore useth her finest notions and excuses to evade the presence of God, and the powerful influences of the Holy Ghost. Like some cunning thief, that joins himself to the unwary traveller, and gives him pleasant company awhile, till at length he draws him out of the way, and takes his purse, before he is aware he is in a wood, and his money is gone. Even so the heart of man professes to be very willing to pray, or perform other duties, and goes with us awhile, but before we have proceeded twenty sentences in our work, this “deceitful heart turns us aside, brings us to feed upon ashes,” and binds up the faculties, that we “cannot deliver our souls, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” Isaiah xliv. 20. Now is it not a hell upon earth to live with such a heart, to cross a man in the midst of his greatest business, disappoint him in his highest expectations, and make him lose his labour, if not his soul?

The remedy against this corruption of our nature is hard. To divert a stream is easy, but to dry up a spring is difficult; stop it here, and it breaks out there. So to divert and discharge a wandering thought is easy in comparison, but kill

one viper, and there is a hundred more ready for the birth.* We think sometimes our worldly business is the only cause of them ; but the most retired hermits prove to us that an unsanctified or half-sanctified heart can find matter enough of diversion in a naked cell. And that the corruption of the subject, as well as the bewitching nature of the object, makes us trifle in God's worship. As Jerome tells of Hilarion, whose heart roving from God, was soundly scourged for his labour by an angel. And therefore the only cure of this is to get a “true and greater degree of sanctifying grace.”

You that have no grace, can never pray well, till your hearts be changed ; a new heart can only sing this new song well.† You complain that you want expressions ; ah ! it is impressions you want, and nothing else ; if you had that sense of sin, which makes the soul ache and mourn, you would find words sufficient to express it, when you are in

* As the ivy, though stump, body, and branches be cut off, yet some sprigs will sprout, till the wall be pulled down. So it is with us.

† I never knew a beggar that wanted words to express his wants. *Bishop Hall.*

danger of falling into hell-fire ; nor smiling at one another, when God is frowning, and thundering against you. He that feels the stone torment, hath few wandering thoughts, while he is telling his grief, and seeking help. The condemned prisoner is not sleeping or trifling at the bar. Dionysius' flatterer had little regard for his music, when the naked sword hung by a hair over his bare head ; neither would a poor sinner, if he were enlightened to see his guilt and danger, so commonly and senselessly trifle before God, when his matter is debating, and terms of life or death being proposed. Alas ! there is no hope of your cure in this, till your fundamental disease be healed ; your whole life is a long distraction from the true end and main business of life ; and therefore it is important if ever you would perform a pleasing duty unto God, to get “ grace whereby you may serve God acceptably ;” * for without that you cannot do it.

And to counterbalance that corruption of nature in you, you that have some sanctification must get

* Lydia did then attend unto the things spoken by the Lord, but it was when he had opened her heart. Acts xvi. 14, 15.

more. This sweet wood cast into that bitter water, will by degrees render it more wholesome. The more sanctification, the more you will be mortified to the world, and all the vanity and business thereof; and then its thoughts and cares will not rush in with that violence upon you, but stay to speak with you at your better leisure; or if they be invading the heart, you will have more vigour of grace to expel them, and more repentance for them; you will be more lively and spiritual, and fervent in religious duties, and so have less room for these wanderings; for he that is fully engaged in his business, prevents the assault of the most importunate diversions; and a lively serious christian runs on his errand like Elisha's servant, "If thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again;" 2 Kings iv. 29; and Satan cannot fasten discourse on such a man; yea, and generally, the more holy the heart is, the fewer of these wandering thoughts; forasmuch as sanctity being his frame and element, heterogeneous bye-thoughts do put him out of his temper and so displease him, and cause some smart to the soul; and the sin that really molests a man, will hardly ever prevail over him; and

finally, the more holiness you attain, the more afraid will you be to displease God. For to be amended with a little cross, to be affected with a little mercy, and to be afraid of a little sin, are certain arguments of a great deal of grace. And therefore a holy christian is more troubled at a vain thought in a duty, than a slight christian is at the total neglect of a duty.

It follows, therefore, that all means be used and improved to the utmost, for the increasing of the grace of God in your hearts, there being as much duty to grow in grace as to get it; and no greater argument of sincerity, than endeavours to grow better. Turn therefore those many thoughts you spend about the truth of your grace, into all possible care to advance and increase it, so will you best clear your doubts, and in particular cure your distractions.

SECT. III.

UNPREPAREDNESS.

THE third cause of distractions in the service of God, is, unpreparedness unto it. “ If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands to him ; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away ; then shalt thou be steadfast.” Job xi. 13. First, prepare the heart, then stretch out the hands. He that keeps not his foot, when he goes into the house or service of God, is very likely to stumble, and to offer but the sacrifice of fools. He that is unfitted for any work, must needs be unfixed in it.* As holy Mr. Dodd used to say of afflictions, when we are prepared for them, they are like a sword that only strikes upon our armour ; but when we are unprepared, they are like a sword striking on our bare skin. Even so, when the heart is well fixed and prepared for the Lord’s service, an impertinent

* Hence David ; Psalm lvii. 7, 8; so Deborah, Judges v. 12.

thought or suggestion falls on our armour, but when we come unprepared, it meets with our very hearts, and runs away with them. If a man come into a prince's presence undressed, unbrushed, or without his band, you may easily imagine how, when he is aware of the feathers or dirt that is about him, he is distracted ; so is the soul wofully carried off, when approaching to God ; the follies of sin and vanities of the world disfigure and divert it from a close converse with Him ; and therefore a serious christian doth not only pray, and watch in prayer, but watcheth unto prayer. We so eat our meat, says Tertullian of the primitive christians, as remembering we must pray before we go to bed. And here I shall answer a necessary question, viz.

Q. What kind of preparation is necessary before our ordinary duties of worship ?

Answ. 1. The light of nature teacheth us to prepare for every weighty action. Approaching to the Lord of heaven and earth is such. Who teaches the client to consider his case, when he comes to state it to his advocate ? or the husbandman to prepare himself for his tillage, or the poor suitor to weigh his request that he makes to a

prince? Why, the light of nature teacheth this; and the light of scripture distinguished an upright man from a hypocrite hereby. “There are good things in thee——in that thou hast prepared thine heart to seek God:” 2 Chron. xix. 3, there was Jehoshaphat. Again, “Rehoboam did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.” 2 Chron. xii. 14. He sought God, it is likely, as many will do, but he cared not how he did it; and so though he did a good thing, yet, saith the scripture, “he did evil.”

Answ. 2. Most certainly the Lord is a great God, who can raise or ruin thee in a moment, and whom the angels approach not without a profound respect; and so likewise duties of worship are great and weighty duties, wherein you transact for a kingdom, and plead or hear the cause that is for life or death. You drink a cup that will either mend or destroy you, and who is sufficient for these things? And it is manifest, that we are naturally unprepared, and to every good work reprobate. The posture of our hearts is inverted, and now they are open downwards, and shut towards heaven; all which if you place together, it must needs follow, that some preparation is neces-

sary, even for the ordinary duties of God's worship.

Answe. 3. The hearts of men are of a different temper, and so are their occasion ; the hearts of some are always in heaven, or else within a call ; they are, as the apostle speaks, “ Ready to every good work.” Titus iii. 1. When a duty of piety is offered they are ready to engage in it ; when an object of charity is proposed, they are ready to distribute. And this present spirit is a great blessing, when holiness is so rooted and framed upon the heart, that God's worship is their element ; the hearts of others, through custom, and supine negligence, abide at a great distance from God ; no little effort will raise them, nor will they be brought in with many calls ; like a great bell, they are hard to be raised ; and as these have a greater unhappiness, so they have need of more pains to fit them for God's service.*

The occasions of some men will give them time enough to set their hearts in order, to state their

* In such case meditation, like a dish of water, may set the pump a going ; yea, foul water may bring up fair water.
— *Bishop Hall.*

soul's condition, and get themselves into a holy heat; and for them to come with cold and dead hearts into religious duties cannot be permitted. The occasions of others are so urgent and continual, that they have much difficulty to redeem time for prayer, and can hardly obtain a period of preparation, especially when a man is surprised with a holy duty, or in prayer at meals, or the like; and therefore one last may as soon fit all feet, as one particular rule suit with every christian.

Answ. 4. The least measure of preparation that is necessary for the ordinary worship of God, is that the heart be called out of the world,* and made apprehensive or sensible of the nature of that God, and weight of that work that you are about; which if you can attain in a minute, or are of necessity straightened or surprised, you will be welcome to heaven; but if you can easily order your time, or not easily order your hearts, and remand your thoughts, you venture on your peril; and if God be not merciful, and you penitent, will

* *Prov.* xviii. 1. If thou canst not always have separating time betwixt other occasions and God's worship, yet have some separating thoughts ere thou enter upon the duty.—*Angier.*

carry away a curse instead you of a blessing. And so I conclude this answer with "let us have grace," not only a gracious habit but a gracious frame, "whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire." Heb. xii. 28, 29.

Think it not much, therefore, to keep or get a heart prepared for the worship of God. When ringers set not in together, there is little but discord in that peal, but when they commence together, there is sweet music; and so it is when all the congregation set out, and take wing at once, it is music for heaven; whereas the heart that is not ready for the duty mostly produces discord and spoils the harmony.* And indeed this unpreparedness of the soul doth make the duty ungrateful to the worshipper. When a friend comes upon you, and you are not prepared, no provision or rooms in readiness, how comparatively unpleasing is his visit, and distracted his entertain-

* When you have prepared your hearts, God will pass by great imperfections, 2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19, and you may then do much in a little time. Psalm x. 17. Thou hast prepared their hearts, then wilt thou cause thine ears to hear.—*Burroughs.*

ment? when to him that keeps a constant table, or hath made set preparation, the sight and conversation of his friend is very sweet; so it is between our God and us; when the rooms of the soul are prepared, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, laid up for our beloved, how can we welcome our Maker on his own cost into our souls? whereas Christ himself hath but cold welcome, and distracted entertainment in an unprepared soul. Lift up therefore thy heart in the porch of a duty, with “turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken me in thy way.” Psalm cxix. 37.

SECT. IV.

LUKEWARMNESS.

THE fourth cause of distractions in God’s worship is lukewarmness.* He that is intense in

* This night past, as I was awakened out of my sleep, the devil came and intimated, that God was far from me, and heard not my dull prayers; so I said, Well then, so will I cry the louder.—*Luther*. And when he found his spirit out of frame, he would never give over praying, till he had prayed his heart into that frame he entreated for.

any thing hath few thoughts to spare. Distractions are but the idlings of the heart, he that runs, looks at nothing but the goal; though he meet passengers, or pass by palaces, he is in earnest and stops for nothing; it is he that walks at leisure who turns his eye to every trifle, and descants on every object, because he is not in haste. Even so the zealous soul, though he forgets not those things which are behind, yet reaching forth to the things that are before, presseth towards the mark; he hath business in hand which concerns eternity, and he cannot stand to whisper with every passenger, nor trifle with every object. It is the luke-warm heart that is prone to that; he can pray to God, and dress himself at once, he can hear God and talk with men, speak about heaven, and contrive about the earth; and in a word, serve God and mammon at the same time. Good Jacob was little troubled with wandering thoughts, when he had “by his strength power with God, yea, he had power over the angel and prevailed, for he wept and made supplication.” Hos. xii. 3, 4. Tears are the best charms to chase away distractions.

While you labour and weep, and pray, wandering thoughts will flee away.*

As there can be no reason given for any sin, called therefore folly, so for this in special ; for if the holy work you are about be worth the consuming of your time, which passeth in every duty, and is most precious, surely it is worth all your pains and diligence. He that loseth his time in the duty, and loseth his soul by his lukewarmness in the duty, makes a madman's choice. For if the sermon, prayer, and chapter, be not worth thy labour, never attempt it ; and if it be, never shrink, nor be indifferent about it. When you see a man freezing at his work it invites a passenger to entertain him with talk. And a frigid attendant upon God tempts the devil himself to tempt him. Wherefore the apostle, Rom. xii. 11, directs us to be fervent in spirit while we are serving the Lord ; not drowsy, but fervent in spirit, or boiling hot, as the word signifies.† The busiest flies will not meddle with the scalding honey ; though the sweet-

* Birds will not light nor stay on flaming sacrifices.—*White.*

† Where could a wandering thought get into that most zealous prayer ? Dan. ix.

ness entice them, yet the heat terrifies them. The base flies of thy distractions will not molest thy heart, if it keep boiling hot in the service of God. A warm and weeping prayer is the true holy water, which scares away the devil.

Now the best remedy against this lukewarmness is, 1. Consideration, and 2. Practice.

1. Consideration of the inefficiency of a frozen duty, which seldom reacheth the heart of God, when it reacheth not our own. That the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent only take it by force. That such duties neither please God, nor ourselves; they mock God, and rather deceive than delight us. That some prayer or sermon must be thy last, and perhaps this present may be it. That it is an irrational thing to bring a dead sacrifice to a living God. That one serious and lively duty does you more good, and leaves a more sweet, blessed and active frame upon the soul, than a hundred heartless services; and in short that the Majesty whom you serve loves adverbs, and narrowly observes the hows and whys of sacred worship; “that it is not a vain thing that you are about, for it is your life.”

Deut. xxxii. 47.

2. Practice is the other remedy. To cure this lukewarmness in God's service, frequent those lights that are burning as well as shining. Let us go to Dedham, said the godly in that time, to fetch fire, when the famous Mr. Rogers was there. If you cannot hear a warning divine, then read such, and be sure to have some books for the rousing and heating of your heart, as others for clearing and instructing your judgement, unless the work of sanctification be perfect already in your heart and affections, while it remains imperfect in your mind and judgement. Associate also with zealous christians, borrow some of their heat and lend them some of your light ; and be not ashamed to talk of God, heaven, and the soul, when you are together ; you lose the benefit of men's graces, for want of broaching those blessed vessels of grace you converse with. Especially read the scripture, which will inflame thee, and mould thee, being rightly used, unto its blessed nature. I have known some, who before their private duties would meditate on a verse in the Psalms, Canticles, or the like, and then hasten warm and lively into the presence of God. And choose rather to be frequent and fervent than long and

roving in a duty. Shorter prayers may sometimes inflame, when long ones tire the spirits ; and that way the ancient saints in Egypt used to take. And lastly, do as holy David did, who carried such a nature as thou dost, be ever calling to God, as he who is at it eight or nine times in Psalm cxix. “Quicken me in thy way, quicken me, and I will call upon thy name :” and if *he* had need thus to fetch fire from heaven, how much more have we ?

Q. Were it not better to omit the duty, than attempt it with such a dull heartless frame as this ?

A. 1. Omission of a duty will never fit us for the better performance of it. Luther used to say, The oftener I neglect, the more unfit I am ; this is nothing but a device of the Devil.

2. If thou endeavourest with thy utmost strength and sincerity, though thou be dull, it is better than to leave it undone ; for as one sin prepares for another, so one duty prepares for another. Fall therefore to work, and when God has engaged to help thee : never think neglect will mend it ; one sin never cures another.

By the upright use of these means, you will find the Holy Ghost, as it were, stretch himself on your cold hearts, and infuse life and heat into you.

And when you are soaring aloft in the spirit, that cunning marksman cannot shoot, and fetch you down by his distracting arrows.

SECT. V.

WORLDLY-MINDEDNESS.

THE fifth cause of distractions in God's worship, is worldly-mindedness. A heart in earth and a heart in heaven are far asunder. As long as the lark soareth upward, she sings without danger of the net; but stooping to gaze on the fowler's deceitful glass, she is quickly ensnared. So is it with us, while we live aloft, we are safe; but when the heart stoops down, and grows worldly through the false glass Satan puts upon it, then are we taken in these snares. "With their mouths they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Ezek. xxxiii. 31. Their faces look one way, but they row another; their eyes are up towards heaven, their hearts set on the earth; and grasping two affairs they prosper in neither. How should he set his affections on the things

above, that hath set them chiefly on things below, when as these two are directly opposed? Col. iii. 2. How should the soul, that bird of paradise, fly up to heaven in a duty, when it is not only weighed down with the lead of natural corruption, but entangled in the lime-twigs of earthly-mindedness? They can never write on their duties, Holiness to the Lord, that stamp upon their coin, God with us. Hence it comes to pass, that the heart is loth to come to an ordinance, and then longs to go out again; how heavily do they go to church, how lightly to the market? for here the heart goes with them, and there it is left behind; and being forced into a duty, because its treasure is in the world, the heart hastens to be there again, and is out of its element when in an ordinance.*

We read of the “world set in a man’s heart,” Eccles. iii. 11, and of “a heart set on the world.” Psalm lxii. 10. Now how should God have any part of such a heart? No, no; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth; there he can rest without weariness; of that he can dis-

* See a plain instance hereof in that hearer. Luke viii. 13, 14.

course without distractions ; but when he should turn to God, and flee to heaven, this care knocks at the door, and that business whispers him in the ear, and there the carcass is left, but the heart is gone. The prophet tells us, that “ whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart.” Hosea iv. 11. It were very unlikely that any man in the heat of those sins should pray, or hear, or meditate aright ; and it is no more likely for a heart that is taken away with the cares of this world, and drowned therein, to converse with God without innumerable wanderings.

Mistake not: it is not the world, but worldly-mindedness that is taxed ; not the increase of riches, but the heart set upon them.* And so, no doubt, a poor man may have his part of distractions, through his want of worldly things, as well as the rich through his abundance. He may have many a distracting thought what to do *for* the world, as the rich man hath what to do *with* the world. And thus we see those things which were given for our welfare, prove our snare ; and what should

* Water under a ship helps it, but water in a ship drowns it.

hire us to serve God, keeps us from him. Which shows what reason the wise man had to crave neither riches nor poverty, but convenient comforts, seeing the weight of the world distracts one sort, and the want of the world another sort, in the very immediate service of God. Howbeit, for the most part, the heart that is fullest of the world is emptiest of God.

Now the best remedy against worldly-mindedness is mortification. O get a view of Christ's cross, whereby the "world will be crucified to you, and you to the world." Gal. vi. 14. So was Paul. As saith Chrysostom, Paul and the world were like two dead bodies, that neither embrace with delight nor part with grief from each other. You must be dead, I say dead to the world, if you mean to live to God, or live with him. A drunken prayer, and a worldly prayer, are alike devout. Therefore,* "Love not the world, nor the things of the world," for so long the love of the Father is not in you; and if you love him not, how should you pray to him? It would be an ill-favoured

* Let not the world be your familiar friend: familiar friends will come in without knocking.—*White.*

sight, to behold all this congregation in their work-day clothes here ; how unpleasing a sight to God is it, to see us all with our work-day hearts ! Now that you may be rid of an earthly heart, faithfully make use of these directions.

1. Get faith to believe the report God hath given of the world, that all that is in it is but the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life ; a poor vain thing, not able to give the soul a breakfast :* This all that have tasted it, and Christ also, do aver ; and canst thou find that in it, which none ever yet found ? will it do more for thee, than ever it did for any one else ? Believe its vanity upon God's word, ere thou prove it by thy sad experience.

Get faith to derive the virtue out of Christ's death to vanquish it. "For this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John v. 4. Lay thee down with Christ in the grave by faith, and say then, What is the world ? Get faith to believe that eternal happiness, which being once

* When we shall have reigned hereafter many millions of years in heaven, what thoughts will remain of this little inch of time upon earth ? — *Bolton.*

seen by that piercing eye, would so disgrace the world, that all the comforts of it wou'd not weigh a straw in comparison of it.* If a man lived in the sun, what a trifling object would the whole earth look! He that lives in Christ in heaven, by faith, sees all the glories of the earth with a disdainful eye, and cries, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

2. You may be helped against this disease, by deep consideration of the folly and misery of such a frame of heart. It is folly, for all that is gotten of the world, with the neglect of the soul, invasion of holy duties, or by a carking worldly heart, comes to thee in wrath, and will sink thee deeper in hell; or if thou repent, is, most commonly, some way consumed. If we could penetrate the method of God's providence, usually those losses you have in this beast, or the other house, or the like, are the just value of what you have gotten by immoderate care, hard dealing with others, or unseasonable contrivance, when your heart should have been better employed. And then the misery of worldly-

* Let their money perish with them that esteem all the gold in the world worth one day's society with Jesus Christ, said Galeacius to a nobleman, who tempted him to apostatize with a great sum of money.

mindedness, that it “pierceth the heart through with many sorrows.” Sorrow and pain in getting, sorrow and care in keeping, sorrow and grief in losing. The heart is never at perfect rest. A man would not use his horse, as a worldling doth his heart, who gives it no quiet or ease, and all this to no purpose at all. “The people labour in the very fire, and weary themselves for very vanity.” Hab. ii. 23. And may not the consideration hereof be an effectual means to promote hatred to this humour? and when it is once hated, it is more than half discharged.

3. Have recourse to God by prayer, and therein see and bewail thy former madness; solemnly vow to restore their right to every man thou hast wronged; rather part, like Zaccheus, with half thine estate, than with thy whole soul and body; and earnestly cry unto the Lord, “to incline thine heart to his testimonies, and not unto covetousness.” Psalm cxix. 36. Entreat your heavenly Father to give you a heavenly heart, and if it come not at first asking, it is a gift worth going for again; humbly tell him, by virtue of that covenant wherein you promised to forsake the world, which you are now resolved to adhere to, his Majesty is bound to

give you a mortified and heavenly heart, and you will never leave him, till you have obtained it.

4. Draw your hearts from worldly thoughts when you go to the worship of God. “The preparation of the heart is from the Lord: commit thy ways to him, and thy thoughts shall be established.” Prov. xvi. 1, 3. The heathen left their shoes at the temple doors, to intimate that all earthly affections must be left behind, when men go to speak with God. Do as that great statesman used, who would lay off his gown, wherein he administered his office, when he went to worship God, and say, “Lie there, Lord Cecil;” implying, he would take none of the cares of his office into the presence of God. So when you go to prayer, reading, or hearing, lay aside the world, and say, Lie there house; ye fields lie there; lie there my cares, till I have done with God. So “Abraham left his servants and asses below the hill,” Gen. xxii. 5, and took up nothing but a holy heart, and the materials of his sacrifice, with him thither. Keep still an eye upon your hearts, and both “watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”

SECT. VI.

WEAKNESS OF LOVE TO CHRIST AND HIS ORDINANCES.

THE sixth cause of distractions in the worship of God is, weakness of love to Jesus Christ, and consequently to his ordinances. Love unites the soul to its object: as faith is the bond of our mystical, so love is the bond of our moral union with Christ. The more love to Christ, the more life in his service. “ Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm : for love is strong as death.” Cant. viii. 6. Were your love more strong, it would seal up both soul and body, and unite them firmly unto Jesus Christ. Love marries the heart and eye to the object; hence it is there is not a distracting thought in heaven, for there love is perfect: they see, and love, and sing ; and praise, and see, enjoy, and love, for ever and ever. The three disciples, Matt. xvii. 4. had but a half-quarter glimpse of that state, but their love to their dearest Lord and his presence was so heightened, that the world was forgotten, Jerusalem below, and all their friends

and fellow-disciples forgotten, and they anxious to abide there. And if we could by the eye of faith see him that is invisible, and perfectly love him, O how hardly could we spare an absent thought in his presence and service! no, all the world would be forgotten, comforts and crosses should all sleep together, while God and our souls were conversing in an ordinance.

Whence is it that most men can work and care perpetually, and no distractions divert them? discourse on their business in a most orderly manner, without one alien thought? drive on a bargain an hour together, and think on nothing but what is pertinent to their present business? Why, they love what they are about; they like it well, and so tongue and heart go together, and are wholly taken up therewith. The jovial band like their company, and nothing is permitted to distract them; the servant comes about necessary business; the master fumes that they will not let him alone; the child comes, and then the wife, but he frets, and is angry. And why all this? because he loves his company, it is his delight, his heaven: even so, the soul that hath a strong love to a precious Christ, and his presence, doth most heavily bear a distract-

ing thought. The devil cannot pluck him from Christ, but the soul smarts ; and when there is this smart at parting, that soul will part but seldom. You have sometimes seen a sucking child, that loves the mother and the breast most dearly ! how loth is it to leave it, while it is hungry ; how eagerly and angrily it seeks, and cries, and catches hold again ! Here is love. Christ Jesus is the spring of all happiness, and his ordinances are his breasts, and he that loves the Lord Jesus with all his soul, and all his strength, draws the breasts of consolation. This business knocks at the door, that trifles tempts him ; yet there he holds and frowns away all his temptations. His love is ardent. “ His delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in that law doth he meditate day and night.” Psalm i. 2. When prayer is your delight and not your task, then you will dwell therein with complacence. “ Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.” Psalm xlvi. 4. Children are subject to look off their books, because they delight not in them ; but when they are playing, they do it heartily. But now when thy love is cool, and weak, thou lovest Christ, and that is all ; alas ! there is little heart to him, the soul comes heavily to him, and having

little delight, and heavenly complacence in him, is most easily drawn off with any distraction ; for where the treasure is, there will the heart be also ; where God and Christ are a man's treasure, his heart is with them. He wakes, and travels, and cares, but his heart is with them ; he runs through his business with all the haste that may stand with good speed, that he may retreat to his heart, which he left with God, and then holy duties are the rest of his soul. And where the world, or sin, are a man's treasure, his heart is with them also ; he reads, and hears, and prays, but his heart is away ; the least noise, business, or whisper, can fetch him away ; alas ! his love is cool, and a drop of water will quench a spark of fire.

The remedies of this weakness of the love to Christ and his ordinances are,

1. Know him better ; and meditate more on his real excellencies. "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" Cant. v. 9. Why, v. 16. "His mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely ;" or, as the Hebrew, "all of him is delights." And then mark the reply, chap. vi. 1, "We will seek him with thee." The pure and orient sun is no more than a glow-worm to the

blind, nor the fairest face than a skeleton. It is the eye that must affect the heart. Come, then, open the eye of faith, and gaze on this heavenly object: sit down, and meditate who, and what he is; open but the sacred cabinet of his attributes, every box is full of the most sweet perfumes: each of his offices is pregnant with true and transcendent comfort. His actions, his passion, his words, his works, and above all, his heart, is as full of heaven as ever it can hold, and full for thee: the “fountain opened for thy sins and uncleanness.” The treasures of his grace free for thy supplies, what heart can freeze under such discoveries? Nay, stay, and look at him on the cross calling thee, with arms stretched out to embrace thee, his heart opened to let thee in, and deny him thy love if thou canst. And if once * your hearts be inflamed with his love, no small affairs shall keep you from his presence, nor distract you in it.

2. Get communion with Christ in his ordinances. As he said on another occasion, “If thou knewst the gift of God, and who it is, thou wouldest have asked, and he would have given thee living

* He loves thee little, O Lord, who loves any thing with thee, which he loves not for thee.—*Augustine.*

water." John iv. 10. So I say, if thou knewst what communion is with Christ, thou would ask after prayer, and long for such opportunities. Why, what is communion with Christ? For thy spirit to fly up into heaven, among the celestial spirits, and for Christ's Spirit to descend into thy heart. And this makes a heaven upon earth; it is inexperience in this, that makes us cool to Christ and holy duties: strangeness makes company burthensome. A king and a beggar, a scholar and a clown, cannot make company of one another. So when there is a distance between God and the soul, there is little longing for his ordinance, nor true delight in it. Communion with Christ increases love, and love to him promotes communion. "O that thou wert my brother," saith the spouse, "the son of my mother," — there is ardent love; "when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee," — there is communion, "yet should I not be despised." Can. viii. 1. If you did but see his power and glory, "your soul would be filled as with marrow and fatness, and your mouth would praise him with joyful lips." Psalm lxiii. 2, 5. One beam of his holiness, love, or mercy, would so charm your hearts, that you would be loth to part, and long to meet again; for

how can it choose but transport a finite heart, to see and feel the sweetest perfections of the infinite God displayed before and graven on it? When Moses was in near communion with God on the Mount, no thinking of meat or cares about his tents below, but there he is swallowed up, and is content to melt in that sun of light and heat, and come down no more; it was easy to count his distractions in the Mount. Oh, who can see the face of God, and not be ravished therewith! who can behold the beauty of the Lord, and not choose to dwell in his presence all the days of a man's life? It is communion with Christ Jesus, that will warm your love to him, and when "the king brings you into his chambers, you will be glad and rejoice in him, you will remember his love more than wine."

Cant. i. 4.

3. Believe verily that you can be nowhere better, nowhere so well as in an ordinance; this will content and please your minds in the Lord's service, when you can be nowhere better; for what company can be better than God's? The chiefest good must needs afford the choicest company; who can impart such rare delights and sweet content as he can? and where doth he communicate himself as

in an ordinance? Say, the world knocks at the door, and would have thee away ; can vanity entertain you like felicity ? can the world produce higher pleasures than he that made it ? Would sin come in and steal your hearts away ? can the chiefest evil create thee sweeter entertainment than the chiefest good ? No, no, you are best where you are. If the world could find you such another Deity, somewhat might be yielded ; or give you security of the reality, satisfaction, and duration of its toys : but, alas ! there is no show for this, you are best where you are. I am conversing with the Lord of heaven and earth, who can reward each petition with a crown. I am in the next employment to heaven, in a corner of heaven, I cannot look off yonder lovely One, I will not leave, I must not come down. And this experience would enrapture you with an ordinance, and deliver you from diversions in it ; "you will sit down under his shadow with great delight, when his fruit is sweet to your taste."

SECT. VII.

WANT OF WATCHFULNESS.

THE seventh cause of wandering of the thoughts in the worship of God, is, want of watchfulness. “ Watch and pray” are most necessary companions, else “ shall we fall into temptation.” Matt. xxvi. 41. In those sad times of plague, the faithful guard stands at the city gates, and the dangerous passenger for all his importunity is stopped and turned again. Why? Perhaps the plague comes with him, and therefore the sword is placed to his breast, he comes not there; the neglect of this care would soon lay waste the land. So if any straggling thought, perhaps with the plague in it, shall enter at pleasure into the soul, especially while the Lord’s service is in hand, no wonder that soul lies waste; Lord have mercy may be written on that door.

1. The neglect of watchfulness before holy duties causes distractions; and that is, by not heeding to order your affairs with discretion for

God's service.* When you involve yourselves in too much business, too much for your head, too much for your time, or too much for your strength, then worldly thoughts will get place; you cannot help it. Or, when men are unadvised in their business, in not choosing a fit time for duties, and thereby your business and God's, shoulder one another, and neither is done well. And therefore we are commanded "to watch unto prayer." 1 Pet. iv. 7. As Satan watches to cross and indispose us, by throwing some diverting and cooling occasions, so is it our wisdom to counter-watch him. Endeavour to time your affairs, and especially your duties. It is the character of a good man, that "he orders his affairs with discretion," Psam cxii. 6, and renders every thing beautiful in its time. For it is a true observation, that an indiscreet ordering of Saturday's business, hath great influence upon the unprofitableness of the Sabbath's ordinances.

Neglect of watchfulness in holy duties. Our hearts, so far as unregenerate, are forced into holy duties, as a pressed soldier into the field: he is

* Through desire a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.—*Prov. xviii. 1.*

brought in against his will, and has no principle of courage, or love to his country : he had rather be digging or idling at home. Now what trust can you repose in such a soldier, if he be not watched ? he steals away, at every lane's end, and in the midst of the battle you shall be sure to miss him ; a constant eye must keep him, or you lose him. It is just so with our naughty hearts, if there be not a predominant principle of grace ; it is not choice but use that brings them in : they would rather be carking or trifling about any thing than busy in prayer ; and therefore if you neglect to watch them at every turn, no sentence ends, but they will steal away. For prayer without watching is but a mere compliment. Where the tongue goes one way, and the heart another, that is a compliment ; and such is a watchless duty. It is said, the nightingale in her sweetest notes is apt to fall asleep ; to prevent which she settles herself on a bough, with a thorn at her breast, that when she begins to nod that sharp monitor may awake her. The holiest saint is apt to nod, and steal away in the midst of his most solemn duties, if God's spirit do not quicken his watch. Christ's own disciples, even just after a sacrament, were overtaken for want of this

“What, could ye not watch with me one hour?”
Matt. xxvi. 40. And if they fell asleep at prayer, for want of watching, how can you keep close to God without it, that have neither so good a monitor without, nor so good a heart within?

3. Neglect of watchfulness after duties causes distractions in the next that follow; people generally let loose their hearts, when the duty ends, and unlace themselves for ease; and then their thoughts take liberty. Our deceitful hearts foreseeing this, no chords will bind them to a good behaviour in the very duties themselves; whereas, were there a constant watch kept up after our duties were done, and conscience made of our thoughts all the day long, we should retain our hearts in better order, while God’s worship lasts. The foresight, and especially foretastes of liberty approaching, sets the soul eager thereupon, and we cannot keep it in. Besides, religion is concatenated, hath a dependence one thing upon another, and it is unsufferable to take and leave where we will. If vain thoughts lodge with you at other times, they will visit you at your business, and if they be enter-

tained when you are disposed to entertain them, they will press in when you have no such mind.

The remedy against this neglect is, to be thoroughly convinced of the absolute necessity of constant watchfulness. “Keep thy heart with all diligence,” Prov. iv. 23, as a castle is kept from scaling, a house from robbing, or a jewel from defacing, so the critics; and all these are kept constantly; one hour’s negligence would hazard any of them.* And then, “with all diligence,” or as the Hebrew, “with all keeping,” or as some, “above all keeping.” The eye we watch from harm all the day, the vitals we defend and guard with constant care; we know that a touch there is mortal; but above all keeping, keep the soul: be persuaded that watchfulness is as necessary as prayer; you think, without prayer you shall go to hell, and I aver, that without watchfulness you cannot go to heaven. Man’s life in this sense is a continued ordinance. “Wait on thy God con-

* Let us imagine a city not only begirt with a strait seige of blood-thirsty enemies, but also within infested with lurking commotioners, how much would it behove that city to stand upon its guard.—*Bolton.*

tinually ;” Hos. xii. 6 ; not only at thy prayers, but at thy plough. While on your knees you are waiting on God, and when you rise from your knees, you are going to wait on him in your calling, and an unbecoming thought is displeasing to him every where ; he is sensible of an affront in the kitchen as well as in the parlour, and hates vanity all the day long. “Be sober, and watch unto prayer.”

1 Peter iv. 7. Sober and watch ; as if they that do not watch are mad. To watch unto prayer is a duty, as well as to watch in it. He that watcheth not to duties, doth not do his duty : a wise Christian should have always something in store for God; work and look at God, eat, and drink, and talk, and still look at God, and at the soul.* This is to walk with God all the day long. As the careful bee must needs leave her hive, and fly abroad, but she dwells nowhere else ; she lights on this flower, and then on that ; exhausts their sweetness, deflowers them, and gets away ; she never rests

* You see the angels sent about God’s messages to this earth, yet never out of their heaven, never without the vision of their Maker ; and so should you strive when you are up and down in your business, yet be within sight of God.—*Bishop Hall.*

till she returns to her hive ; there she rests and enjoys herself. So a holy heart must needs out into the world, and business must be done, but he rests at nothing till he return to the enjoyment of God again ; no flower gives him content, no business, no company, satisfies, but he retires to God, looks at him, and is lightened, and steps out again. This, sirs, this is the religion of religion. * I know it is hard, but it is possible ; the ice is broken for you, and the way is trodden. “Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence.” Acts xxiv. 16. It is my daily trade and business to keep my soul, that I neither offend God nor man. If you will make a trade of it, you may do it. God never calls for duty, but helps in it. “I can do all things through Christ.” Phil. iv. 13. God and his servant can do any thing.

* It is a thousand times easier to keep the flood-gates shut, than to drain the lower grounds when they are over-flown.—*Bishop Hall.*

SECT. VIII.

A BELOVED SIN.

THE eighth cause of distractions in holy duties is *a beloved sin. When the soul hath espoused some bosom lust, the thoughts, be you never so busy, will be warping towards it, though God himself look on. “O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness :— how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?” Jer. iv. 14. When wickedness is in the heart, vain thoughts will be in thy duties ; they will enter, yea, they will lodge within thee. A beloved sin is like a bias on the bowl, though you throw it out never so straight, yet the bias will draw it off that way, do what you can : so is a beloved sin unto the soul ; aim you with utmost skill, yet there is a secret load-stone in it, which attracts the heart, and makes that prayer to end in hell, which began

* Observe, that some make a difference between a beloved sin, and a reigning sin ; a beloved sin rules over our sins, not over our graces ; a reigning sin rules over both.

in heaven. Either sin and you must be at a distance, or God and you will. The soul that is in league with sin, dare not come to God, dare not look at him, dare not think on him ; and what must that man think of in a duty, that dare not think seriously on God ? As that penitent Father speaks in his confessions. An unmortified soul, like the husband of a scolding wife, had rather be anywhere than at home, and makes many a sad bargain abroad, because he hath no comfort at home with his wife ; so such a heart chooses to be thinking of any thing rather than God ; alas ! matters are not straight between them ; the poison of sin is in him, and he embraces that abominable thing which God hates. The thief had rather go forty miles another way, than come near the judge ; God is an offended judge to a wilful sinner, and he cares not ever to come near him. Hence “let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” Heb. xii. 22. He that comes to God with a true upright honest heart, being sprinkled from an evil conscience, may draw near to God in full assurance of faith : whereas guilt clouds, clogs, and distracts the soul. So that you see, both the

guilt and power of a bosom sin furnish us with too much cause of distractions. Sin, that would have all the heart; and God, he will have all or nothing. It is such an offering, that is a whole burnt-offering, that the Lord delights in. As no subject is capable of two contrary qualities, in the intense degrees, as heat and cold may be both in the same hand, but not in their intense degrees, so the heart of man cannot entertain Christ and corruption, light and darkness, except the one be loved and served superlatively above the other. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Psalm lxvi. 18. God first stops his ear above, and then the sinner's mouth below, that regards iniquity, that likes, loves, approves, or gives it rest and quiet in the soul. Indeed, God neither regards him, nor doth such a soul regard God. He must love God that is lively in his service. "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?" Job xxvii. 10. Will he always? he may now and then send a thought that way in his special need, but not always: there is difference between converse and communion. One may have converse or traffic with a stranger upon occasion, but communion is with a friend. A hypocrite may

have some converse, or trading with God for necessities, but sweet communion, constant calling on God, and serious duties, he can never enjoy and follow, that loves any sin before the chief good.

The remedies against a beloved sin are briefly these two :

1 Consideration. Sit down and think what real good this sin hath ever done thee. Think what hurt it hath done thee and others, and what fruit besides shame and death it brings to any. Thy dearest sin is but sin, which is the worst thing in the world, and, its masks and disguises being laid aside, more ugly than the devil, more horrid than hell itself. And think, the more thou lovest it, the more God hates it, and his rage and jealousy are increased with the increase of thy desires. Think how many prayers it hath lost thee, how many mercies it hath poisoned to thee, how many smiles it hath clouded, besides what unutterable sufferings it hath inflicted upon Christ, and is preparing for thee in hell. Consider, that thou mayest have as much joy, happiness, and true comfort without it; and all converted sinners confess, that Jesus Christ hath been better to them than all their sins; and if you may have as good enjoyments,

or better, to have Christ with them, and heaven after them, will not make them worse.

2. Supplication. Kneel down and pray with faith in the uprightness of your hearts, for strength from above. All the strength of heaven is engaged by prayer. He that heartily sets himself against his sin by prayer, cannot but dislike it; and when it is truly disliked, its heart is broken.

Augustine complains, that when he, in his unconverted state, begged a divorce from his sin, his heart was afraid, lest God should hear his prayers. Beware lest your hearts secretly cry spare, when your tongues openly cry, Lord, kill and crucify my corruption: but do thou really pull on earth, and the Lord will pull from heaven, and rend thy sin and soul asunder. Otherwise, as the poets tell us of Hippomanes, that running with Atalanta for victory, he conquered by throwing golden apples down; which Atalanta stooping to take up, lost the prize; so Satan seeing the soul running heavenward in God's service, will throw down the gilded temptations of a beloved sin, stop in its career, and hazard the prize of eternal glory.

SECT. IX.

SATAN.

A NINTH cause of distractions in the worship of God, is Satan. And this he doth sometimes more remotely, by throwing in some cross business before duties, whereby the soul is unhinged: some person or letter with business, just before prayer; or some passionate circumstances in the family, whereby to lay matter to excite our discomposure and wanderings in the following duties. Sometimes he approaches nearer, and by presenting objects to our senses in God's worship, draws off the heart: he can stay one long from the congregation, that another may be distracted in observing him coming in, and so wounds two, and sometimes twenty at a blow. Satan is not idle, when this and that child are restless, and unquiet in the family; whereby perhaps all in the family lose the thought which would most profit them. He can create and promote distraction by every pillar and part of the structure, and every person in the congregation;

and can be content that you should read sentences on the walls to hinder and divert your souls from the sentences that drop from the pulpit. Yea, he often approaches nearer, and works immediately upon the fancy, upon which he can imprint a thousand notions, most strange and incoherent, to steal the heart from God ; for we are not ignorant, the more is our sorrow, of his devices. Hence we see him, “ When the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord, coming also among them.” Job i. 6. And being questioned, says, that his business is to “ go to and fro in the earth,” and “ to walk up and down in it ;” as if he walked only out of curiosity, or for some charitable end : but as our Lord Jesus went up and down doing good, this was his work from morning to night ; so the devil walks up and down doing evil. He is in every pew, at every elbow, throwing in his fire-balls, and enticing poor souls to commit folly with him ; and when God is treating with the soul about heaven and hell, then comes he* and thrusts the world between, or some vanity

* Satan cares not how heavenly our words be, if our thoughts be earthly — *White.*

therein, to break the treaty, and spoil that sacred conference ; so that of all roads, no road is so full of thieves as the road to heaven.

And thought to give the devil but his due, we can make shift to be bad enough in an ordinance without him, yet he waits there no doubt to make us worse ; what else should bring thoughts then into our head, that have never come there for a month or year before ? who else should suggest such horrid atheistical thoughts, when we are distressed with convictions, and move us to question all when any thing pursues us ? “ We wrestle against spiritual wickedness in heavenly things or employments.” Eph. vi. 12. The devil is wickedness in the abstract, when we are about heavenly work. Never did the crafty cheat watch and spy how to defraud the innocent merchant, while he is receiving his cash, as Satan lies at the catch in the worship of God, to purloin from us the true treasure, that should make the soul rich. Especially * that prayer, or chapter, or sermon, that should do thee most good, or most destroy his

* The highway-ground-hearers had the word taken from them by the devil, that is, by such wandering thoughts as he immediately casts in.—*Angier.*

kingdom, will he be most busy in. When the high-priest was interceding for the poor church, then Satan stood at his right hand to resist him; hence our most solemn duties often have the saddest distractions, and such as have no coherence or reason for them; but arrows, fiery darts, shot out of the devil's own quiver. What a sort of them have I in the very writing hereof, and what long parentheses between every sentence, and you perhaps will not want while you are reading, yea it may be, as the body, when the humours are stirred by physic is worse, so he will be busiest to divert and trouble your hearts, while the cure is working. But when your heart is prepared before, and watchful in your duty, though yours be the sorrow, that you have the womb that bare them, yet his will be the guilt, because he is the father that begets them.

The remedy against Satan's distracting us in God's worship, is that of Christ's own prescribing, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Matt. xxvi. 41. Stand upon your guard, give no heed to his suggestions. As you run to the water with the bucket, to quench a spark of fire in the thatch, so drop a tear of contrition upon this spark of temptation. Trifle not with these thoughts, but

dismiss them unregarded, and by some short ejaculation call in thy friend to countermine thine enemy. And still watch and pray, and pray and watch, and always remember that we have as much need of the strength of Christ for assistance, as the merit of Christ for acceptance in every duty. And be sure to cast out his injections with disdain and hatred. As Luther says, he is a very proud piece, and cannot endure contempt. The stronger is your resistance the longer will he stay away ; and the more you hate his motions, the less disposition will he have to offer them. The devil is like that Sanballat, who sent to Nehemiah, while busy in the work of the Lord. “And I,” saith Nehemiah, “sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down ; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it and come down to you ?” Nehem. vi. 2, etc. “Yet they sent messengers unto me four times after this sort, and I answered them after the same manner.” Come, says Satan, let us meet and confer ; here is a notion, and here is a business ; you must needs discuss this. Nay, say thou, I am doing a great work for eternity. As that celebrated painter Zeuxis, being demanded a reason of his exact

curiosity in his work, answered, “I paint for eternity.” So, I am doing a work for eternity, I am pleading the cause on which depends life or death, so that I cannot hearken to thee. Why should my great work cease, while I leave it and come down? Alas! this business will go no farther than it is lifted at; I am rowing up a river, if I trifle or nod a little, I go down again.* I have a business on the wheel that cannot be left a minute. If I look away, my iron burns, and I suffer loss. Yet he will send messengers over and over again, as Sanballat did; but still answer them after the same manner. Discourage him, and break his heart with thine obstinate resolution; “resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

SECT. X.

VAIN THOUGHTS OUT OF DUTIES.

THE tenth cause of distractions in our Lord's service, is, vain thoughts at other times. For

* It is said, Gen. xv. 11, when the fowls did alight, Abraham drove them away; not when they were sitting or feeding upon the carcases, but as soon as ever they alighted. We must not give place to these thoughts, no not for a moment.
— *White.*

1. These displease the Spirit of God; without whose help these infirmities will crowd in upon us. If you should lodge your noble friend, whom love only moves to visit you, in the same room with a dirty beggar, may not he take it for a plain affront, and refuse to come near or help you in your need? Even so the Holy Ghost, your noblest friend, will take it ill to be placed in a room with base and beggarly thoughts, and may justly deny that presence and assistance which we have need of; and without God's Spirit helping us, we cannot pray as we ought, nor keep out distractions, whatever may be our skill. "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities," Rom. viii. 26, and these wanderings are some of those infirmities, which the Spirit must help us about, yea and will, if he be not disengaged; but it is far from likely, that we should have that sacred Spirit at our beck in duty, whom we have distasted all the day long. How justly may He say, as it is, Jer. xi. 15, "What hath my beloved to do in my house?" or, as the margin, "What is to my beloved in my house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many?" As if he should say, I know not what to do with thee in my house, or what thou hast to do with me, having roved so extremely with

thy heart from me, and been lewd with many. Remember it is the Holy Ghost who hates a sinful thought any time of the day. That man must walk with God in the day, that will have God draw to him at night.

2. These dispose and naturalize the soul to roving. Habit is a second nature,* and it is almost as hard to wash an Ethiopian white, as to break an evil custom. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots, then may ye also do” or think “good, that are accustomed to do evil.” Jer. xiii. 23. If a man be accustomed to ill company, and is linked in with them, though he sometimes resolve better, yet when they come, away he must go with them against his purpose. Perhaps you have resolved against these vain wanderings in God’s service, but being used to them, they call at the door and take you captive away against your intention. And therefore set up a constant watch against them, for religion is linked together in the power and practice of it. So that you must take all or leave all; be a christian always and altogether, or

* Hereby holy thoughts become tedious and painful, for we strive against two natures, one that sin hath brought, and another that custom hath wrought.—*Angier.*

not at all. It is said of the accursed Mahomet, that he had used a dove to come to his ear, and thence to eat her commons, and so when the falling sickness surprised him, his pigeon presently came to her repast, which he feigned to be the Holy Ghost or an angel, that told him the mysteries of his religion. My beloved, if these fowls, these evil angels, be used to your ear or heart, they will come even in your most celestial employments, and divert and distract you; and hereby they become less strange, and things that are familiar to us, though ugly, are not started at; nay treble diligence will not dispel them, if you give them ordinary entertainment. If a way be made over your corn or ground, and people are to come that way, it must be a higher hedge than ordinary that must keep them off. If vain thoughts have made a road over thy heart, and come that way without control, it must be a very high and strong watch and resistance that will turn them by in holy duties. “He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down and without walls.” Prov. xxv. 28.

3. These vain thoughts at other times make us apprehend it more impossible to conquer, and less

sinful to be conquered by them. And when distractions appear so powerful that there is no resisting them, or so harmless that they are not worth our trouble to resist them, then is a flood-gate opened to let them in ; when once our courage is conquered, or our conscience is seared, we are quite undone. And thus you see that one sin ushers in another, and the looseness of our heart at one time, prepares it to be so at another. Even as you observe your children are more unruly before strangers, or when they should be most demure, than at other times ; and you are then more aware and troubled at their shrewd words and gestures, than the whole year besides ; alas ! it is not merely that they are worse then, but then you take more notice of it ; it is then more observable and apparent, though their carriage be much the same as usual. So it is with your hearts : O, cry you, I am more pestered with foolish thoughts in prayer or sermon, than in all the day or week besides ; then my heart is worst, when it should be best. Alas ! it is naught all along ; it does but as it used to do, only you observe it not at other times, and now observe it a little and find it out, but it is always so.

4. These do infect the memory, and imprint such notions there as offer and produce themselves, when we are in the service of God. And so when “a good man out of the good treasure of his heart should bring forth good things,” he stumbles upon the vain and unprofitable trash, before laid up in his memory, to the grief of God’s spirit, and hazard of his own. The memory, you know, will most easily retain an impertinent story, a filthy or foolish imagination a long time, and then when an idle heart hits upon it, though God himself looks on, that will run away with the heart, and give both matter and strength to a long, woful, and wandering distraction.

How doth the active fancy in our sleep sometimes light upon some sorry thoughts we had in the day, and take them by the end and spin them out into a very unhappy dream? and this casuists say, we are responsible for, thought it seem involuntary; because we administered matter for it, and remotely promoted it; so we shall be found guilty before God, even of our unwilling wanderings in God’s service, because we laid up for them before. If we brew for them, Satan will be sure to broach them.

5. These idle thoughts, at other times, provoke God to give us up to our own inventions. As that dreadful word, “ Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.” Hosea iv. 17. Seeing he will be married to them, and forsake me, let him take them. If a man be resolved upon idols, or any other sin, God will not hinder him. So when he finds the heart joined, taken up, and pleased with vain thoughts, good motions knock and wait, but are not accepted or heeded; come and knock again with double earnestness, “ How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee ?” but are not regarded, sin and the heart are making merry within; come and try once more, open now or never; and no answer; nay, now the soul is joined to these things, “ let him alone.” Sleep on now, and take thy rest. Trouble him no more in his vain inventions. “ So I gave them over to their own heart’s lust, and they walked in their own counsels.” Psalm lxxxii. 12. If they choose hell before heaven, let them take it. My spirit shall not always strive with man. And now when the soul is given up to a vagabond frame, then thy weak purposes and saint watchfulness over it stand for nothing, but are broken like Sampson’s cords; and a deluge of all manner of

impertinencies breaks in, and the heart is prostituted to all temptations.

The remedy against these idle thoughts out of duties, is,

1. A right understanding what a vain thought is. Though it sound somewhat harsh that all thoughts are either good or bad, the matter of some being in itself indifferent, yet if we consider the principle and tendency of them, we shall hardly light upon one individual thought, but it hath either the stamp of good or evil upon it. It is certain, that a wicked man's thoughts are all vain, as they come from him, neither flowing from a sanctified heart, nor being directed to a divine end. Ah! poor sinners, your hearts are little worth, the imaginations of them are materially, or formally, or finally evil, only evil, and that continually. The sweetest words from corrupt lungs do stink in the nostrils of them that stand by, and so your best thoughts coming from corrupt hearts, cannot be right in the sight of God.

And then for a gracious man, it should seem every thought comes either from the old man or the new, the regenerate or unregenerate part; especially if we consider that there is hardly a

thought but it may be resolved ultimately either into Christ or self. Let it therefore be concluded, that every thought that is not suggested or directed by the Spirit of God, and that no way conduceth to the glory of God, the good of your neighbour, nor the welfare of your own soul or body, is a vain thought, it might be spared, it stands for nothing, it is worse than nothing.

2. Be thoroughly convinced that vain thoughts are sins.* They are not free from the law of God, though they be free from the lash of man. The Rabbins had a strange exposition of that text, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me;” Psalm lxvi. 18; they read it thus, “If iniquity do but remain within the heart, and be not produced into act, God will not regard it;” and so the Pharisees of the decalogue, as if God had only forbidden the outward acts of sin; but there is nothing more contrary to the nature of God, or of his law, or of the souls of men, than this. I wonder how they could overlook all these direct passages in the Old Testament, “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart — thou shalt not say

* The greatest good and evil that ever was in the world was first but a little thought.—*Angier.*

in thy heart," Levit. xix. 17, and innumerable other such passages. No, no, thoughts are words before God, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." Ezek. xi. 5. What is sin, but a deviation or transgression of the law of God? and this is a woful thing. Sin, even in a thought, is a woful thing; nay, words and actions are as it were sins at second-hand. The very first life, and freshest vigour of all ill, is immediately inspired into the thoughts. Hence it is that Peter advised Simon Magus to pray to God, if it were possible, that the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him: as though there lay the greatest guilt, and deepest stain before God. Alas! one vain thought would bring down the highest angel into the lowest hell; and that which would damn an angel will damn thee, except thou repent. If millions of angels have fallen by sinful thoughts, and yet thou standest under the guilt of many, thank free grace, and the death of Christ for that; but yet thy sin is still as bad, and thou hadst need to "cleanse the filthiness of the spirit, as well as of the flesh."

3. Daily wind up your spiritual watch, and renew your covenant with God in prayer. Draw

all your parts and faculties into covenant; “I made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” Job xxxi. 1. Behold the blessed purity of this man’s heart! Neither eye nor thought of his should wander after a maid; and this he vows. Though good purposes are the resorts of hypocrites, whose covenants to God are like ropes of sand, broken as soon as made: yet when they are accompanied with repentance for former falls, and hearty endeavour for future performance, no better sign of an upright christian. Know that constant watchfulness is a duty; that as nature hath provided a cover for the eye, so grace hath prepared watchfulness for the soul; and as it would be a fearful sight to see an eye without a lid, it would soon be put out; so it is a fearful thing to keep a soul without its case, without its watch. “Let not thy heart envy,” or imitate, “sinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long;” Prov. xxiii. 17; not only at prayer times, but all the day long. Be sure that every morning you sincerely and solemnly relieve your watch, by new purposes and prayers, and then when vain thoughts attempt to come in, you may say, “I have sworn, and I will perform

it, that I will keep thy righteous judgements.” And labour that all your thoughts may hold weight with that excellent scripture, “ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Phil. iv. 8.

4. Repent thoroughly and heartily for them. For as humiliation without reformation is a foundation without a building, so reformation without humiliation is a building without a foundation, which the next wind of temptation will throw down. “To wash the heart,”—mark, it must not be swept only in the brinish tears of repentance,—is the way to “dislodge vain thoughts from within you.” Jer. iv. 18. If you felt the smart and bitter pangs of true repentance to-night for your vain thoughts, it would affright and mortify the heart from them to-morrow; you would have no mind to tamper with the vanities that cost you so dear; the burnt child would dread the fire, and the fresh remembrance of the heart-ache you had for these guests yesterday, would bolt them out from coming in to-day. If our sins cost us, in David’s sense, broken bones,

we should not so easily sin again. If the scholar, after his improper absence, stole to his place unobserved and uncorrected, he will easily venture on his freaks again to-morrow ; but if he tasted the rod, the smart he felt will somewhat warn and keep him from such follies again. Ah ! sirs, our repentance is easy, and our confessions compliments ; we forgive ourselves ere God forgives us ; we can consider ourselves whole without the cost of a tear or sigh, and then we are ready for a sin again ; he that finds it easy to repent, will not find it hard to sin. Verbal repentance will never cure you of real sins. It is your sad thoughts that will prevent your vain ones, and idle thoughts are best excluded by keeping the heart full of good ones.

SECT. XI.

A DIVIDED HEART.

THE eleventh cause of wandering thoughts in the ordinances of God, is a divided heart ; “For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.” James i. 6, 8. The

forlorn picture of a roving heart, carried up and down, as the wind of any temptation pleaseth : the cause, a double mind ; “ a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” The word signifies one that hath two souls ; one that “ speaks with a double heart.” Psalm xii. 2. Like that profane wretch that boasted he had two souls in one body ; one for God, the other for any thing that came. This man is the unstable man in God’s service, off and on with God, unfixed to his business, knows not what he would have, prays and unprays, wants faith for the ballast of his soul, and so is carried at the pleasure of every wave ; and then is the misery of this frame. “ Let not this man think that he shall obtain any thing of the Lord ;” that is though God may answer such requests out of his superabundant mercy, yet such a man can look for nothing. Though a distracted prayer may receive something, yet it cannot expect any thing from God ; when a man’s supplication is a provocation, there is little hope : he that puts treason into his petition, hath little reason to hope for a good answer.

Now a heart may be said to be divided in a duty these ways : —

1. When all the heart is not engaged therein ; as when the understanding or conscience, without the will or affections. This opens a door unto distractions, “ Doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men.” Eph. vi. 6. Half a heart can do nothing with God. A man may as well with one eye observe the stars, and with the other measure the earth at the same time, as at once transact affairs with God and man. Hereby both objects are spoiled : conscience of God hinders from any discreet and serious contrivance of any thing in his presence ; and tampering with the world provokes God, and hinders the affairs above. Our Lord Christ is most peremptory in that case : ye cannot serve two masters, the one will be over-served, “ Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

2. The heart may be said to be divided when it is unfixed and indeterminate,— wavering and unsettled. A duty to God is shooting at a hair’s breadth ; if a man be uncertain and unsteady, how shall he hit the mark ? “ O God, my heart is fixed ; I will sing and give praise.” Psalm lvii. 7. Now the work is likely to go on. You cannot, it seems, so much as sing a psalm, or give the Lord

praise, without this fixedness of heart. As you have seen the needle in a compass, waver up and down perpetually till it point towards the north, then it is fixed and standeth still ; so until the soul be composed, and bent directly towards God, it wanders and trifles everlastingily.

3. The heart is divided by hypocrisy.— “Purify your hearts, ye double minded.” James iv. 8. As he speaks to open sinners to “cleanse their hands,” so to close hypocrites, to “purify their hearts,” that is, be sincere. A hypocrite is a man of two hearts, and both little worth ; one good one is worth a thousand pair of double hearts. Hence holy David, “Unite my heart to fear thy name,” Psalm lxxxvi. 11, else I shall have one heart to move me towards thee, and another heart to fetch me back again. One heart for God, and another for Baal, and so shall halt between them.

4. The heart is divided when you perform not his service with all your might and strength. “Cursed is he that doth the work of the Lord negligently,” Jer. xlviii. 10, loosely, that unbends his bow, that unstrings his heart in the Lord’s service. He that is studying with all his might, the least noise or word distracts him, and troubles

him ; he cannot admit or endure the least diversion : so he that is intent with all his might in God's service, cannot give room for the least by-thought. No, I am before the Lord, and I can do but little ; but I will do what I can. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, praise his holy name." Psalm ciii. 1. And this leads us to the remedy for this evil.

The remedy for a divided heart is to get sincerity and seriousness. And indeed the soul that is sincere is serious. The real beggar entreats in good earnest ; he cries, he weeps, he heeds not the playing of the children, nor the barking of the dogs ; his wants pinch him, his stomach craves, nothing but meat will please him. There is music perhaps within, and company without, but all is lost to him ; he is not concerned therewith, he is hungry in good earnest, and therefore still he cries for bread ; so it is with the upright and serious heart ; he is really and deeply pressed down with sin, and needy of grace and comfort ; he sees the reality of invisible things ; he fears the anger of God, and feels his broken bones, and therefore let the devil, or the world, disturb what they can, or suggest what they will, he plies his business, he must have

pardon and grace, and the light of the Lord's countenance: it is not the stirring of a feather which can unhinge him, for he is in good earnest. "For who is this that hath engaged his heart, do draw nigh to me, saith the Lord." Jer. xxx. 21. Where sits that man, that gives a heart to God? the Lord cries, Who? Oh, let every one that reads this, cry out, "Lord, it is I;" and when the heart, the whole heart is engaged in a duty, then work goes on. There is a vast difference between the pleading of an orator, and the pleading of a malefactor. The former hath perhaps a more smooth, elegant, and starched discourse, but he handles it with a light finger; a friend or a fee would take him off; but the malefactor that pleads for his life, cries and begs; the judge interrupts him, but he goes on; the jailor tries to stop his mouth, but he will proceed; all the court cannot distract his mind from his business, his heart is wholly in it. And so it is with a sincere and serious saint: he can truly say, Lord thou hast more of my heart than ever any creature in the world had; my heart is fixed, I am set upon this affair; the great matters I am about, I neither can live nor dare die without them, and

therefore blame me not that I am busy. It is the prayer that costs us much which prevails.

SECT. XII.

AN OPINION OF NO GREAT EVIL IN THEM.

THE twelfth cause of wandering thoughts in God's worship is, "an opinion that there is no great evil in them;" which partly proceeds from the notion, that thoughts are free, or at least, that no sin is really sin except it be voluntary, and these are without consent; partly from our being used to greater sins, which widen the conscience to digest these lesser ones without any straining; and partly from the commonness of them, being the snares wherein we are most frequently taken; and the oftener they walk through the heart, the less strange are they there; the more familiar they are, the more apology we make for them; and so usually it becomes a sin that we have a mind unto.

And now, when there is bred in the soul an opinion that there is no evil, or next to none therein, the heart is pleased with it, and merrily plays

with those baits, till by the hidden hook it is caught in the unseen snare of the devil. To rectify this mistake,

1. Somewhat must be granted. The evil in these wandering thoughts is not so great, as in many other sins ; these do not lay the conscience waste as some others, especially those roving thoughts, which are rather injected, than contrived ; the matter whereof is good, not evil, and which are short and grieved over. But who will swallow a spider, and say, there is not so much poison in this as in a toad ; or break his leg, and say there is not such danger therein, as breaking the neck ? even so, it is a poor plea to say, these trivial things are not like oaths, and murders, and oppressions, etc. But these are great enough to displease God, to bind guilt upon the soul, to prepare for greater, and therefore bid fair for hell.

2. Something must be answered, as namely,

1. That our thoughts are free from the notice of men on earth, or Satan in hell, further than they are imprinted in the body or actions ; though they are free from the punishment of human laws, yet are they not free from the eye, nor wrath of God, as you heard in divers instances before, and par-

ticularly in the case of Simon Magus. Acts viii 22. And, 2. That other notion is corrupt, that nothing is culpable that is involuntary: it is true, this doth extenuate a fault, but this doth not extinguish it: it is a less fault* in that case, but it is a fault; for the understanding may be depraved as well as the will; and we are really guilty in Adam's sin, though we had no previous consent therein. It is a fault that we are subjects capable of such sinful injections, though we yield not to them; for there is something in us which encourages those attempts: the angels meet with none of these. The will in a sort lies dormant when we are asleep, and yet casuists say, there wants not sin, even in our dreams; for the fancy and the memory may be corrupted, as well as the will; and therefore it follows, these wandering thoughts may be against God's will, though they be beside our own. And, 3. For our proneness to greater sins, and frequency in them, that signifies little

* Nay, in some respects, the more involuntary any sin is, the more strong and natural it is; and the more natural, the more horrible; as a natural thief is worse than a deliberate thief, who sometimes steals: and in this respect, involuntary sins may be worst of all. — *Shepherd.*

herein: for crimes do not excuse faults. The stars are the same in the firmament all day, though while the sun shines they appear not; when the sun is retired, they will show themselves: while your greater sins appear, these are nothing; but if ever a night of terror come upon you, then each of these will shine in its proper guilt, in the eye of conscience. And then, 4. The commonness of them adds to their sinfulness, though it lessen your sense thereof. If your neighbour for a time break over your hedge, and tread down your corn, the matter is soon made up, it is but a trespass by chance; but if he daily do so, and make it his way, you think it is intolerable; so if a wandering thought stole in once a week, it were a less offence; but if they will transgress and make a way over God's ground, spoil his garden often in every day, this makes the sin the greater, though the sense of it be the less.

3. Something must be advised for cure. And that is, 1. A true knowledge, and deep sense of the nature of sin, whereby you will see, that no sin can be little; that there is more evil in the least sin, in a vain thought, than in all the plagues and judgements in the world besides. Hence, saith

God, "Behold I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts." Jer. vi. 19. All the possible sorrows that can tear the mind and soul; all the sickness and sores that can be inflicted on every part of the body; all the mischiefs that can sink thy name and estate, put them all together, amount not to that real evil that is in the least sin.* For it is an offence to God, displeasing him whom the angels study to please, and would not offend for ten thousand worlds. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned." Psalm li. 4. The greatest evil in sin is, that it is against God; by it you provoke the highest Majesty, and offend your chief friend. And if I know a little thing will offend such a Being, I am a wretch for a little thing to offend so great and good a friend. Might not Adam have argued thus, it is but an apple, there can be no great hurt in this; what is this to breed a quarrel between God and me? and yet we have found that little fig or apple a great

* The least infirmities do break the first covenant of works, and hence you do not only deserve, but are under the sentence of death, and curse of God, by the most involuntary accidental infirmity, according to Gal. iii. 10.—*Shepherd.*

sin. Here was all, God was disobeyed, his will opposed, his sovereignty and mercy trodden under foot ; and this is the nature of sin : whereof, if the soul have a deep sense, it will excuse no longer, but frightened at the hideous look thereof, fly even into the fire to escape it. “I hate vain thoughts ; but thy law do I love.” Psalm cxix. 113. I not only avoid them, but I hate them ; I see a sinning evil in them ; I see a damning evil in them. I hate vain thoughts ; not only wicked, wanton, revengeful, proud, or blasphemous thoughts, but vain thoughts ; empty thoughts fill me with grief.* Natural conscience may abhor the former, but a soft heart can only oppose the latter. And there is the means he used ; “thy law do I love ;” he that loves a pure law, cannot but hate a vain thought.

2. You must apprehend the evils, yea, the great evils that are in this sin. For though we grant there is more of poison in some other sins, and in some distractions more than others, yet

* Though to live in the greatest sin, may consist with the form of godliness, yet to live in the least, may not with the power thereof.

there is much evil in the least of these ; which on purpose to ripen your most serious resolutions against them, I shall now in the seventh place discover —

CHAPTER VII.

THE EVIL OF DISTRACTIONS.

SECTION I.

SINS AGAINST THE FIRST TABLE.

THE evil of distractions, is, 1. In their nature ; 2. In their effects. Behold the former in these demonstrations.

1. These distractions in God's worship are sins against the first table. And these proportionably are always greater than those against the second, yet they are a violation of every precept of the first table.* For how doth he acknowledge God, that in his very presence

* It would be an heinous offence among the incense offered to God, to have put brimstone. Thy prayers are thine incense, but thy distractions are brimstone, that stink in his nostrils.—*Chrysostom.*

offends him? or how dost thou honour, love, and delight in him, as the chiefest good, when thou startest aside from converse with him, to parley with the world and sin? There is the first commandment broken. Do you worship him according to his will, that thus worship him? If material images be cast off, and spiritual fornication committed, ye are still breakers of that commandment. A graven image in the mind, a worldly or wicked fancy there, where Christ should be, cannot but provoke him to be very angry. There is the second commandment broken. And these manifestly break the third commandment, being a palpable "taking his great name in vain." To speak of God, and think of the world; to hold discourse with him, and to think of your lusts, is a high taking his name in vain. As if the wife should be speaking busily with her husband, and at the same time looking at the picture of a paramour, what rage would this excite in her husband's heart? To make the name of God a cloak for the things of the world, for the worst thing sin, is the saddest sacrilege; and for which he will not hold you guiltless if he find you griefless. And then the fourth commandment is broken by a direct

theft committed of God's holy time ; that which you *consecrate at your kneeling down to his service, is purloined away by these roving thoughts, especially when they invade the sabbath. For when you seem to give him much, in effect it comes to nothing ; sift out the bran of your wandering thoughts, and the flour of holy service will be next to nothing. And so your time is lost, your duty lost, and danger of your soul's loss after all. And thus you see the first table broken at a blow ; it is a sad blow which breaks four commands at once.

SECT. II.

DISTRACTIONS ARE HEART SINS.

THE second evil in their nature is, that they are heart sins. "There is no faithfulness in their mouths, their inward part is very wickedness." Psalm v. 9. As wounds in the internal parts of

* God forbids us to find our pleasure on his holy day. Isaiah lviii. 13. And do we not find our pleasure by our thoughts ? — *Angier.*

the body are most dangerous, because hard to come at and cure. Hence, it is easier to cure a swearer of swearing, than a roving heart of its distractions. And as these sins are more dangerous, so are they very displeasing. The heart is God's field, the inclosure he keeps for his own walk and delight. He hath said, "My son, give me thy heart." Prov. xxiii. 26. Now to injure him of his peculiar, to thrust him out of his mansion-house on earth, the heart, is no small injury, affront and unkindness. And such a "backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways," if he fill not the sacred bottles with his tears. And they are more heavy to the conscience, in that they meet with no shame or trouble without, which is the ordinary lot of other sins, but are begun and perfected in the heart within; and their guilt is greater because their shame is less. And they do thereupon leave, as such other sins do, a deeper sting of remorse, and horror of conscience, when the conscience is awake. There is much evil in these. "I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me." Zech. vi. 9.

SECT. III.

THEY ARE SINS IN THE SPECIAL PRESENCE OF
GOD.

THE third evil in the nature of them is, that they are sins in the special presence of God. We read of God showing the prophet, with infinite wrath, “five and twenty men at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east, and they worshipped the sun towards the east.” Ezek. viii. 16. This he highly resented, that in his temple they should have their faces towards the sun, and turn their backs on him. This is the manner of a roving heart. In God’s own presence he turns his back on God, and his face to the things under the sun, and those he worships. O infinite patience! that turns not such a soul into a pillar of salt; yea, throws it not into a pit of brimstone! “Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord God, surely, see how he binds it with double strength, because thou hast

defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thy abominations, therefore I also will diminish thee. A third part shall die with the pestilence.” Ezek. v. 11. Which of all thy detestable sins but thou hast committed in the sanctuary and presence of God? now a proud, now a wanton, then a worldly thought. Ah, says God, I cannot bear it. He that provokes me to my face, shall feel it. Few think these sins have brought the plague, any more than the Corinthians did their unworthy partaking at the Lord’s table. In his special presence he looks at thee. “He sets all our iniquities before him;” but he places these “secret sins in the light of his countenance.” Psalm xc. 8. O this is an evil thing, and a bitter, that thou shouldest provoke the Lord to his face, and that his fear doth not awe thee. “Yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord,” Jer. xxxi. 11; this pollutes it with a double stain. “I am God Almighty, walk before me and be thou perfect.” Gen. xvii. 1. To believe that you are sitting, standing, kneeling before God should make you perfect. How seriously doth the child stand before his father, the scholar before his master? and shall the child of God only

forget himself? the poorest scholar, before the best masters? Remarkable indeed was that execution.—Two of Aaron's sons came with their censers, “and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not; and there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” Lev. x. 1, 2. Behold the dreadful hand of God! before him was their sin, before him they were punished. Lord, how terrible art thou in thy holy place! If no place will deter them from sin, no place shall be a sanctuary to them from judgement. What are distracted thoughts but strange fire? and a *strange punishment may the workers of iniquity have, if timely repentance prevent not.

SECT. IV.

DISTRACTIONS ARE SINS ABOUT THE MOST SERIOUS BUSINESS.

THE fourth evil in their nature is, that they are sins about the most serious business. The grand-

* A greater curse goeth with an evil thought in God's service, than if it were another time; times of blessing perverted, are times of greatest curse.—*Angier.*

est affairs under the sun are transacted in an ordinance. I have read of a nobleman of this nation, that when his cause of life and death was trying, though he had a pardon in his pocket at the same time, he was irrevocably sentenced, being during that time asleep ; he was sleeping while the judge was passing sentence. Was not this a gross neglect, and did not he, suppose ye, bite his nails, and beat his head, that could not watch when his head was in question ? Sinner, thy head, and life and soul, and all are in question ; thy eternal happiness is completing, or thy dreadful sentence passing, and is this a time to trifle and wander away from God ? If you should come to the elbow of a counsellor pleading at the bar, much more of one impeached for treason, and tell them, such a companion hath sent for them to the tavern, or that the cattle have broken into such a field, or that such a game of chess is likely to be lost ; with what disdain and indignation would they reject such a message, and cry, Is this the time to trouble me with these things ? when the very hearing of such an errand may lose my cause, or hazard my life.*

* Consider what a prayer is worth ; every thing is worth, according to what we can have for it ; why a man may

Are corn or companions equal to immortal souls ? What are these to the things between God and me ? If the dead must not be burried when Christ calls ; nor a man stay to take leave of his friends, how greatly doth he trespass that runs riot after toys and sins, when the great God calls and calls again ? We have a clear instance. The preacher was at Martha's house, and serious in his sermon : Martha, good woman, was cumbered and distracted with much serving ; Mary sat at her Saviour's feet, and heard his word. Saith Martha, I think it much that my sister must have all the dainties, and I all the distractions ; master, rectify this inequality. Ah, saith our Lord, " Martha, Martha, thou art cumbered, or as the word signifies, distracted, about many things ; but one thing is needful." Luke x. 41, 42. Mary is embarked in a most necessary affair, and worldly cumber is improper for a heavenly business. She that is working for her soul, hath work enough at that time. Salvation, eternal salvation ! Eternal sal-

have grace and glory for a fervent prayer. If you should sell that for a trifle, when another had thousands for the same, wouldest thou not befool thyself ? — *White.*

vation of soul and body; these are not things to trifl about.

SECT. V.

DISTRACTIONS ARE SINS OF HYPOCRISY.

THE fifth evil of these rovings of heart, is, that they are sins of hypocrisy. And there can be no little evil in the sin of hypocrisy. What is hypocrisy, but the honour of the lips, and the distance of the heart, Matt. xv. 7, 8, as it is said of the nightingale, a sound of words, and no soundness in the heart, that is hypocrisy, of all sins most odious unto God and man. And though the purpose of the heart be wanting to make it formal, and full hypocrisy, yet a custom in these will produce that at length, and he that useth to lie in jest, will come at length to lie in earnest. “Ephraim compasseth me about with lies.” Hos. xi. 12. Oh, how often may the Lord say over us, These people compass me about with lies. What a generation of vipers are here! like the viper that is speckled without, and poisonous within! Moses took a veil when he

spake to Israel, and put it off when he spake to God. But the hypocrite doth quite contrary, he shows his best to men, his worst to God, but the Lord sees both the veil and the face ; and it is hard to say, whether he hates more the veil of dissimulation or the face of wickedness. This is a disappointing of God, in a sense deceiving him. “Cursed be the deceiver, that hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to God a corrupt thing.” Mal. i. 4. Yea, saith God, you have in your flock a male, you can be serious when you will, but a corrupt thing, it seems, will serve my turn ; you disappoint me, you deceive me, you appoint a meeting between your heart and me, and here I come, and the heart is gone ; you knock at my door, with great earnestness, and when I come, the heart is gone ; you are deceivers, and deserve my curse. If this be not repented and reformed, such deceitful hypocrites must carry away no blessing of mine, but a curse.

A prayer, though but of forty words, sincerely made and every syllable felt, shall prevail more with God, than a long oration with half a heart ; and the meanest sermon heard with a prepared, humble, and attentive heart, shall receive a greater

blessing, than a better sermon with a worse heart ; for God is a spirit, and appearances are nothing with him ; he that seems to serve him, and doth not, provokes him the more. An eye to heaven, and a heart for hell ; and humble knee and a haughty spirit ; a serious posture and a frivolous soul, are abominable to the Lord.*

SECT. VI.

DISTRACTIONS ALIENATE THE HEART FROM DUTIES.

IN the next place, the evil of distractions is seen in their *effects*, whereof these are some.

First, they alienate the heart from holy duties.†

* Thy wandering duties Satan keeps as bills of indictment against the great day ; what is good in them, he lays before thee now to quiet thy conscience, but miserable comforters are those which pacify the conscience, but purify it not.—*White.*

† In this sense they are a curse ; for what is a curse but separation from God. Think then when wandering thoughts come to us in holy duties, the curse comes, and when they stay with us, the curse stays.—*Angier.*

When we miss of God, we have small mind to his service again. It is the comparison of a learned divine, when there is no marrow in the bone, we quickly throw the bone away; even so when the sweet enjoyment of God is not found in an ordinance, which is lost by the roving heart, we shall ere long cast away that ordinance, except shame or custom restrain us. Now when the soul cares not for prayer, or other ordinances, it is a sad effect; the Lord may say to thee, with more right and reason than Dalilah did, "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?" Judges xvi. 15. What love is that without a heart? Where the affection is, there the thoughts will be also. I may truly invert this and say, where the heart is not before, there love will not come after. Let the whole soul be seriously engaged in any duty of prayer, singing, reading, or hearing, and you will be loth to leave that duty, and wanting to be at it again. O the sweetness therein and love¹ thereunto! "I shall never forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me." Psalm cxix. 93. Oh, when shall I come and appear before God! O that every day were a sabbath, then should I be well, as said that famous instance of practical

piety, Mr. Bruen, of Bruen Stapleford. Hence, with a gracious heart, one duty prepares, and gets a relish for another. But you shall find, when the heart is out of tune, and beating about the bush, and but little of it with God ; O then, it is the most wearisome employment in the world ! A man had rather thrash than pray, that hath his heart in the barn, when he is in prayer. And there is no lively desires, or longings of soul to that business, wherein he felt so little of God. Hence it is so hard to get a worldly family together to prayer ; alas ! the duty is a distraction to them ; when they come, they still leave their hearts behind them ; you cannot make them enjoy an ordinance, whose hearts usually run out of an ordinance.

SECT. VII.

DISTRACTIONS AFFRONT THE MAJESTY OF GOD.

THE second effect of distractions is, that they much affront the majesty of God. It was a high affront to God that his people, after they had experience of him, yet in “their hearts they turned

back into Egypt." Acts vii. 39. This is the wisdom of a roving heart; come, say they, we like not this presence nor work in our hearts; let us walk into the world again. "But as for them, whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things, I will recompence their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord God." Ezek. xi. 21. Here one detestable thing offers itself and there another; for every thing that draws the heart from God, its chief good, is therein detestable. Now when "the heart walks after them," that is the right vein of distractions. Where the heart walks after every trifle, he shall have enough of his ways, saith the Lord. Must the great God wait on a simple worm, till he can be at leisure to speak with him? shall the worst of evils be courted, while the chief good is slighted, and yet even then pretend his service? As if some miserable scullion at the court had made use of great means to possess the king with his low condition, and when the king is come to speak with him, he lies sweeping the sink, or scouring the spit, and there lets his prince wait on him to no purpose; may not he justly say, when I come next to meet you, you shall know the difference between the majesty of a king, and the

wretchedness of a scullion. Just so, poor soul, do thou and I obtain leave to approach our heavenly Lord and King, and when he expects the heart earnestly to solicit her great affairs, she is roving away, and bestowed in the kitchen, or worse, while the great and holy God stands waiting to be gracious. What father but would take it for a great indignity to see his son stopping his ears, or whistling, or playing with flies, while he is reading his last will and testament to him, or giving him directions about his greatest affairs? And is not God greater than a father? and can he with his honour abate such a child his punishment, if he do not humbly cry to him for mercy, and study to offend no more? Though divine vengeance be not always as visible as a parent's rod, yet it is as real and more heavy.

SECT. VIII.

DISTRACTIONS HINDER THE BENEFIT OF ORDINANCES.

THE third effect of distractions is, that they hin-

der the benefits of a holy duty. God seldom thinks of those prayers, that we think not of ourselves. "And there is none that calleth on thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." Isaiah lxiv. 7. The Lord counts such prayers as none at all, when a man doth not stir up himself to his business.* That which in God's account hath no being, can have no good effect. The benefits of ordinances are many and great; they are like the medium to sensation, as the air to the eye or ear: there is no seeing nor hearing without it; so are ordinances to the soul; they are the conduits to convey God's grace to us, and our desires to him; when a dirty distraction gets in, the conduit is stopped and the soul starved. And in this sense God's name, which should be most sacred and dear to us, is most palpably taken in vain. When we use a great solemnity to no effect; the wind and tide to serve, and yet the soul to sleep; the mariner to be at dice or cards, till the opportunity

* What is the reason that christians are so much shadows rather than substance, when they come to forgive injuries, depend on God, etc., but because their service of God is more in show than in substance, according to that threatening, Isaiah xxix. 13, 14.—*Angier.*

be lost, what a great evil is this, when our voyage is for life and death? If you could by the expense of one serious hour gain a lordship, would you not be intense and earnest that hour? would you not reject the company that would divert you, and disdain any ordinary business that would interrupt you? O stay, and let me alone this hour, for I am busy. Now by the good management of one serious hour in prayer, reading, hearing, or meditation; you may, yea shall infallibly gain at least one grain of grace, which is worth more than a kingdom, yea, than a whole world. And is not that an evil thing, and bitter, that then interrupts you and frustrates your profitable employment, whereby it comes to pass that you get nothing? Pearls are being given, and you get nothing. Orient graces in the hand of God, ready to give, and you obtain none of them; who would entertain, that can be rid of such companions.

SECT. IX.

DISTRACTIONS DEPRIVE THE SOUL OF ITS COM-
FORT.

THE fourth effect of these distractions is, that they deprive the soul of its purest comforts. The highest, truest, and purest joys and comforts, meet the soul in the service of God. “I sate under his shadow with great delight,” there are then delights, and great ones too in the ways of God, “and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” If thou hast any spiritual taste, his fruit will be sweet to it. “He brought me to the banqueting-house.” Cant. ii. 3, 4. God’s house is his banqueting-house, and every ordinance is a rare feast to the soul that doth spiritually improve it. Now these idle wanderings of the heart, first by their *disturbance*, then by their *guilt*, do damp and deprive the soul of the comforts thereof. Just as a black cloud doth hide from you the bright and warming beams of the sun. How often have you missed of those joys of the Holy Ghost, sweeter than the music of the spheres, by these vain thoughts? with what sweet content do

you look back on a duty, where communion hath been held between God and you? and what a folly is it to lose an hour, and neither reap pleasure nor profit by it? *

There is fatness in God's house, and rivers of pleasures with him, but he shall have "leanness in his soul" that gives way to these, and of all those rivers drinks not a drop, not one drop of true comfort and pleasure. O what a heaven do negligent sinners lose? how many gracious smiles, blessed tokens, celestial raptures, the dainty diet of angels, and all through the idleness of the soul! "My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness;" I am full, brimful of joy and comfort, my heart runs over, and "my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips." Psalm lxiii. 5. Now all these gleams of sweet comfort and refreshing, are stolen away by these wicked distractions. For an upright and attentive heart would seldom want the sweet com-

* Thy prayers will tire thee out, for thou hast only the difficult part of duty; thou crackest the shell, but eatest not the kernel; like one that reads an excellent book, whose sense or language he understands not, which is a great trouble, whereas he that understands both is much delighted.—*White.*

forts, that usually accompany sincerity and seriousness. He that can keep his meditations fixed on the right object, his meditation shall be sweet; and where should the Lord make his servants joyful, but in the house of prayer?

SECT. X.

DISTRACTIONS GRIEVE AWAY THE HOLY GHOST.

THE fifth effect of distractions in the worship of God is, that they grieve away the Holy Ghost. It is true what the blessed apostle hath said, “The Spirit helpeth our infirmities,” Rom. viii. 26, and so he helps against these when they are but infirmities mourned for and striven against; but when they are contracted habits, then they grieve and quench the Holy Spirit. The Greek word in that scripture signifies “to take and heave up a thing over against you,” to heave with you. But if our spirits instead of helping shrink away, and heave none, this promise will do us no good. If we leave the business wholly to God’s Spirit, without our *diligent co-operation*, he will leave it to our spirits,

without his *divine co-operation*. The Holy Ghost will dwell only with a holy heart, and these idols in the heart do heavily trouble that sweet Spirit. “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face, should I be inquired of at all by them?” Ezek. xiv. 3. Read on, and you will see what consequence this is of. What are worldly and sinful distractions, but idols in the heart? what are abused objects of the eye or ear, but the stumbling-blocks of iniquity before the face? and how can the Holy Spirit dwell in such a soul, or abide such doings? Luther somewhere says that the Holy Ghost dwells not in Babel, but in Salem; that is, delights not in the heart where is nothing but confusion, that is the meaning of Babel, but in the heart where there is quiet, peace, and freedom, that is the meaning of Salem. “In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Sion.” Psalm lxxvi. 2. The unkindness offered is very great; as if you should earnestly importune some noble friend, to accompany and help you in some arduous affair, and he comes to go with you, once and again; and still, when you should come along, and promote your own business, you steal

away about some trivial matters, and leave your noble friend in the lurch. This is the very case : you humbly importune the Holy Spirit of God, to help you in the service of God, and he most graciously comes to help you ; but one distraction or other charms away your heart ; and the Holy Ghost is left alone. And thus he is often sinned against, till at length he is sinned away. In this way often you see the evil of distractions, which was the seventh point to be handled.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CURE OF DISTRACTIONS.

SECTION I.

DISPEL THE CAUSES.

AND if there be such great evil in these distractions, and evil effects of them, what shall an upright heart do to be rid of them? I say, *an upright heart*, that inquires for means, to use them, and craves a remedy, not to look at, but to apply to remedy the evil. And art thou thus resolved, that readest these lines? For us to spend our skill, and you your time, without full purpose to practise, is labour in vain; nay, it will harden your hearts here, and increase your condemnation hereafter. You will deceive yourselves, and disappoint us, if you rest in hearing, without doing what you hear. Well, then, are you resolved unfeignedly to take the Lord's counsel for the destruction of your dis-

tractions? Stop a little and resolve. And now let me put that question to you, “Who is he that hath engaged his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord?” Jer. xxx. 21. Who is this? who will do it? who is thus well advised? that hath *engaged*, not only made a proffer, but *engaged*, and that *his heart*, to approach unto God, and where, in this congregation, doth that man sit or stand, that out of a deep sense of the hatefulness and hurtfulness of this *sin*, doth now engage his heart and soul to use all means against it, and that in the uprightness of his heart? The Lord your God sees who yields and cries out, “Through grace I am resolved.” Well, on that condition I proceed to direction.

1. *Dispel the causes before-mentioned*, and use the remedies prescribed against them; and here, if you be in good earnest, you will look back and review them, and the helps adjoined, and beg of God, as you read them, “In this, Lord, pardon and help thy servant!” A man of small skill may easily stop the symptoms of diseases, as the present pain in the teeth, or the like; but he is an artist, that removes the causes of them; and it is more easy to turn off two or three of these vain thoughts,

than to heal the soul of the *thought-evil* in the causes thereof. If these remain, atheism, unpreparedness, lukewarmness, worldliness, and the like in the heart, all the rules and receipts under heaven will never cure you of distractions. For there will still spring up continual supplies from these corrupt causes ; as the lopping of the boughs will still have new sprouts coming, until the roots be stocked up ; and therefore with faithfulness, and resolution, set upon all those remedies that have been prescribed. Beg of God to dry up the spring, else your damming up the streams will do no good When the causes are dispelled, the cure is wrought.

And here is a plain discovery of a hypocrite in heart : if some light, easy receipt will help him in any case, he may apply it ; but if he must go about and take pains ; if the way of cure be in any degree intricate or difficult, then he throws it up, and never will go to the bottom of his business ; whereas the upright heart doth but desire to know what to do, what is God's method and way, and then, long or short, hard or easy, he never disputes, he demurs not, he falls to work, he knows every inch he goes, he gets advantage, and “in

keeping of God's commandments there is great reward." The speediness of his cure he desires, but the soundness of it he insists on, and counts no trouble in the cure like the *evil* of his *sin*. Are you resolved in this? else it is to no purpose to proceed. To stumble at the threshold presages ill. But if we be clear thus far, I proceed.

SECT. II.

BEWAILE YOUR FORMER FAILINGS HEREIN.

BEWAILE your former failings in this respect; this will divers ways conduce to your amendment.

1. *Morally*, being an argument that you really dislike the sin, and *the condition* of God's pardon thereof. The ordinary "Lord have mercy," doth herein fall short of pardon, because it is not spoken in tears; if God did but see a man grieve for his sin,* a little ado, a few words, should get forgiveness. The publican had but a short prayer, nor

* No man was ever kept out of heaven for his confessed badness, but many have for their supposed goodness.—*Chapel.*

David upon his dreadful fall ; but they were words that were felt, they were heart-deep, they swam in tears, each word fetched a drop of blood from the heart ; and God was well pleased with them in Christ. When Antipater had written a long letter to Alexander, against his mother Olympia, his answer was, Dost thou not know, that one tear from my mother's eye, can wash away all her faults ? So one penitential tear from a believer's eye can prevail much with God in Christ for the pardon of his wanderings ; but the most embroidered phrases, without this christian grief, prevail not with God at all. But when your conscience is touched, and the heart melts and bleeds for your faults herein ; now, saith God, I see yonder man cannot live *with* a wandering heart, and therefore he shall live *without* it. I will never see him drowned in his distractions, that is thus drowned in tears about them ; if he really dislike them, I will really dispel them.

And then again, till their guilt be pardoned, our hearts are usually desperate ; like a wicked spend-thrift, while hopeless of a discharge from all, treasures up sin unto sin, till that dreadful pay-day come, the day of judgement. Whereas when sin, this sin, is truly grieved for, the Holy Ghost doth

ever bring a pardon in one hand, and a remedy in another; at the same time to clear the guilt and cure the disease. Oh, saith the soul, I am defiled, I am wounded in my flight to heaven, I am disappointed in my affairs, my God is angry. I have sinned just then, when I should have washed out my sins. I have sinned against my remedy, and how shall I be cured? Oh! was there ever such a rotten backsliding heart! such a Cain-like wandering frame? what place but hell is fit for that heart that cannot rest in heaven? Ah! Lord, I wonder that the end of my prayer is not the beginning of my punishment. Though these be but small like the sand, yet being many as the sand, how can I stand under them? I am ashamed, yea, even confounded for these reproaches of my duties. Nay, then says God, who hearkens behind the curtain all this while, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is not he a pleasant child? I will remember him, I will have mercy upon him." When thou art ripe for hell in thy own eyes, then art thou ripe for grace and glory in the eyes of God. No man shall ever be overborne with a sin he hates. Go, my blessed Spirit that has melted him, and mend him, that hast softened him, strengthen him; he that

laments his sin shall never languish under it.* The sacrifice of a *broken heart* do please him, though the sacrifice of a *broken Christ* alone doth satisfy him.

2. *Dispositionively*, grief at heart doth help forward the cure of distractions, and that by softening the heart and so fitting the same for the impressions of God's will. When the wax is melted, you may turn and mould it which way you will; so when the soul is melted by grief for these sins, God Almighty may easily be heard, and his counsel will be taken. And also godly sorrow, as was before observed, doth so afflict and makes a man's heart to ache and smart, that he will take some pains to prevent the like anguish again. When they knock at the door, you will say, O these are they that cost me dear at such a time; I feel yet the sad impressions of my late affliction for them; I found a pardon no easy enterprise, nor repentance so pleasing a potion to brew for it again. I would not for all the world, much less for one vain thought or

* To weep for fear is childish; to weep for anger is womanish; to weep for grief is humane; to weep for compassion is divine; but to weep for sin is christian.—*Bishop Hall.*

two, nor for a thousand worlds together, be under that anger of God, nor feel one drop of his scalding indignation, which I have perceived for these offences. O sirs, where godly sorrow is in the power of it, what carefulness doth it work? what zeal, what indignation, yea, what revenge? It makes sin lie like a mountain upon the soul, musters up all the aggravations of sin, and sets them home on the heart. O to sin in an ordinance! against such a God! in the midst of my greatest business! after such conviction! vows and promises of exactness before him! To offend Father, Son, and Holy Ghost at the same time! heart of stone, dost not thou melt? yea to offend the angels of heaven, which holy spirits turn away their faces at our vanities in the assemblies; yea, and offend the angels upon earth, God's ministers, while that which cost them most serious pains, is spoken to the air! to wound my own soul in the professed act of curing it, and increase guilt when I am professedly getting it cleared! to play the hypocrite before the face of God, the judge of heaven and earth! O wretched man that I am! O my sin is exceeding sinful! O rend my heart! O thou Most High! A broken heart to-day will be a good

preservative against a wandering heart to-morrow.

SECT. III.

ENGAGE THE ASSISTANCE OF THE HOLY GHOST.

ENGAGE the Holy Spirit of God for thine assistance. “Without me ye can do nothing.” John xv. 5. Supernatural work cannot be done without supernatural help. You may and ought to do what *a man* can do ; that is, compose yourselves, and guard your senses ; but you cannot do that which only *a God* can do ; that is fly up, and fix your hearts in heaven. “We cannot pray for any thing, for matter, as we ought, for the manner, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us.” Rom. viii. 25. The Greek word signifies, the Spirit *over and above* steps in and helps ; or, as *others*, makes vehement intercession for us. We climb up the ladder as well as we can towards heaven ; but, alas ! it wavers, no stability till the Holy Ghost hold it at the top, and draw, and lift us up, and then we get a sight of heaven. And you have resolved perhaps, and been secure of a good

frame; but "he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Prov. xxviii. 26, you have found no fixedness or liveliness in your spirits without the assistance of God; he that prays aright, must pray in the Holy Ghost. Jude 20. This also quickens and heats the soul, whereby there is no room, or leisure for distracted thoughts.

Hereby the soul is carried straight up to God and stays at nothing on this side heaven; yea, by the Spirit's blessed assistance, "every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." O blessed frame! when every thought is compelled to obey Christ; there is none can deal with our spirits, but the Spirit of God. When the *word* comes in the hand of the Spirit, there is no avoiding it. Then the reading one chapter can convert, as that Job i. did the learned Junius; yea, of one verse as that 1 Tim. i. 15, did Mr. Bilney; yea, one sentence can comfort the heart, as that, Isaiah lvii. 15, did the afflicted conscience of one that nothing else could satisfy; thereby the soul is carried up, as Mr. Tilleman, the martyr, was in his devotions, so that he saw or heard nobody, till after long search and great noise, his persecutors took him up from his knees. The heart is so carried

upwards to God, that all the world looks as inconsiderable as an atom at that time, and not worth the thinking on ; and is entertained with that sweet content, that it cannot wish to be anywhere else ; and therefore a by-thought is as unwelcome as base company to him that is busy with nobles.

Beg therefore of God, with earnest importunity, at the entrance of every ordinance, for his Holy Spirit ; and he hath said, “he will give his Spirit to them that ask him.” Luke xi. 13. Say, Lord, if thy Spirit go not with me, let me not go further. For as the intercession of Christ is absolutely necessary for your acceptance, so the intercession of the Holy Ghost is necessary for your assistance. The Spirit itself also making intercession for us with sighs that cannot be uttered. Promise your heavenly Father that you will never willingly disoblige or grieve away his Spirit again. Art thou dead ; cry, “Quicken me, and I will call upon thy name.” Is thy heart roving, cry, “Unite my heart to fear thy name.” Humbly plead his promise, that he will put his Spirit and fear into your hearts, that you shall never, and if never, then not in his solemn ordinance, depart from him ; and observe the gracious gales of the Spirit, and when they

clash not with the rules of his holy word, lay hold on them, and fall to duty. It is best rowing below, when the wind blows fair above. When thy heart is warm and in tune, then do thy business thoroughly. And beware of grieving him between times; let there be a coherence between prayer and practice; let your whole life be of a piece, lest he withdraw when you have most need of him. And remember that to grieve the Spirit often, is the way to quench the Spirit, and to quench the Spirit often is the way to do despite to the Spirit. That is a rare expression, “If ye live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit;” Gal. v. 25, how far is this phrase from general apprehension or feeling! To live and walk by the conduct and quickening of the Holy Ghost, this is the life of a saint. And then he that walks in the Spirit, “prays also in the Spirit, and watches thereunto.” Ephes. vi. 18. Whereby those fiery darts of the devil, that would conquer the strength of a man, are crushed and chased away by the strength of a God.

SECT. IV.

BELIEVE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

BELIEVE in the presence of God. The eye of the master makes the scholar busy. If his eye be off the scholar, the scholar's eye is off his book. "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved!" Psalm xvi. 8, else your hearts will be moved, and removed too upon every motion. And therefore faith, which doth realize invisible things, is of great use in holy duty. "He that cometh to God, must believe that he is. Heb. xi. 6. He must as fully believe that God is present, as if he were visible; that thou art encompassed and involved in the presence of God. If thou go forward, he is there; if backward thou mayest perceive him; on the left hand, there he doth work, though thou canst not behold him; he hides himself on the right hand, that thou canst not see him, yet he knoweth the way that thou takest. Job xxiii, 9, 10. This is his common presence; but then in an ordi-

nance, there he is in the *midst* of his people ; there he looks over heaven and earth as nothing, and to this man he looks, that is poor and contrite, and trembles at his word ; and therefore when you pray, you must not only speak, as speaking of God, but to God. It is slighting a prince when we deliver a petition, and look another way ; we bid our children look at us, when they speak to us, and so should we at God, who is not far from every one of us in his ordinances. There he is with his host about him ; and though he is above us to determine whether his angels are employed to conduct his word to us, or our prayers to him, yet it is certain that they attend the great *Jehovah*, and never more willingly than in his ordinances ; being transported with joy at a sinner's conversion and most pleasantly feasting on our penitential tears.

It is true, God is always, and everywhere with thee, with those more common attributes of immensity, power and providence ; but in his worship, there he is also present by his grace, mercy, holiness, and efficacy.* His common presence

* Remember, there is above thee a hearing ear, a seeing eye, and a register-book, wherein all thy thoughts, words,

may be compared to the sun in a cloudy day ; it is in the sky, we have great benefit by it, we should die without it ; but his special ordinance presence, is like the sun breaking out of a cloud in a summer morning, that discovers atoms, warms our bodies, and refreshes our spirits. Even so the common presence of God upholds the world ; in him we live, move, and have our being, and the belief that *God is every where* should persuade us to sin nowhere. But now the special presence of God in his worship, that like the sun breaking out, enlightens the mind, warms the heart, and melts the most rocky soul. Hereby God doth, as it were, shine directly upon us ; so that to trifle or sin before him, is a crime intolerable. The name of every place, where God is rightly worshipped is *Jehovah Shammah*, the Lord is there.

Thy closet, *the Lord is there* between thy chair and thee, and canst thou shift from him ? thy bed-chamber, *the Lord is there* between thy bed-side and thee, and canst thou turn from him ? by the fire-side with thy family, the name of that place is

and actions are written, and thou shalt not do amiss. A Rabbin to his scholar.

Jehovah Shammah, and wilt thou sleep? In the assembly, *the Lord is there*, and what are the persons there, in comparison of him? O therefore hear and look at God, and pray and look at God, and meditate and look at God, sing psalms and still look at God. It was Hagar's saying, "have I also here looked after him that seeth me? And she called the name of the Lord that spake to her, Thou God seest me." Gen. xvi. 13. O call the name of the Lord that speaks to thee, and the Lord to whom thou speakest, "thou God seest me."* Keep thy eye upon him, as he keeps his eye upon thee; find a fairer object, and gaze and spare not; but while there is none in heaven or earth desirable like him, let nothing in heaven or earth distract thee from him. The lively sense of this will charm the heart exceedingly, and we steal from duty because we see no one there. It is said, "a king that sitteth in the throne of judgement, scattereth away all evil with his eyes," Prov.

* God looks not at the oratory of your prayers, how elegant they be, nor at the geometry of your prayers, how long they be, nor at the arithmetic of your prayers, how many they be, nor at the logic of your prayers, how methodical they be; but the sincerity of them he looks at.—*Brooks.*

xx. 8 ; that is, his very countenance should read such a lecture of justice, temperance, chastity, and piety, that every spectator should fear to do otherwise. O then, how should the presence of God so enchant the soul with holiness, goodness, and sweetness therein, that not one thought could be spared from so lovely an object !

The full and clear vision, and fruition of this presence of God doth so eternally ravish and content the soul in heaven, that they would not look off the face of God for a thousand worlds ; no, though all the kings of the earth in their greatest triumph, should pass by the heavenly gates, with the earth's utmost glory with them, a glorified soul is so full of the presence of God, that it would not spare one minute's look to see it all. It is said of one *Theodorus*, a martyr, that in all his tortures he smiled, and being asked his reason, answered that he saw a glorious youth wiping the sweat off his face, whereby he was infinitely refreshed. If thou couldst but see by the eye of faith, the blessed face of God smiling on thee, and with the handkerchief of his love wiping thy sweat and tears away, thy heart would be glad, and thy glory rejoice, and thou wouldest say, Lord, it is good, yea, it is best

for me to be here. Go not willingly from him, without a sight of him; *Moses* had few distractions when he saw God face to face. The actual faith of a saint engages the actual presence of God. *Drexelius* tells us of a vision of a holy man, and behold in the temple, an angel at every man's elbow that was at prayer; he that prayed with malice in his heart, his angel wrote his petitions in gall; he that prayed coldly, his prayers were written in the water; he that prayed with distractions, his suits were written in sand; and he that prayed in faith, his angel wrote his petitions in letters of gold. The moral whereof at least is good; if thou wouldest believe that every word spoken by thee or to thee, is written, with what care and conscience wouldest thou pray and hear? And be sure, there is one among you that takes notes of all, who will give to every man according to his works, whom to see and feel in an ordinance will release you from distractions.

SECT. V.

LAY A LAW UPON YOUR SENSES.

LAY a law upon your senses. Beg of God to sanctify them; as they are all pensioners to Satan by nature and agreement, so bring them all into covenant with God, that ye may be sanctified in soul, body, and spirit. Give them to him, use them for him. It is said, "The fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth." Prov. xvii. 24. Any new face that comes in, any strange garb, any noise about, every head that moves, every leaf that stirs, commands the eyes and heart of a fool, but "Let thy eyes look straight on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee." Prov. iv. 25. Compose thy eyes in that devout and heavenly posture, that whatever falls out, thou mayest keep to thy business without wavering. For the heart is used "to walk after the eye," Job xxxi. 7, to the undoing of the soul.

It is a precept among the Rabbins, that if a Jew be at prayer, though a serpent come and bite him, yet he must not stir till he hath done his duty.

Satan, that old serpent, will be nibbling at thy heel with one vain suggestion or other ; but go thou through with thy business, and let God alone with him.

In prayer then, fix thy *eyes* heavenward, and let nothing divert them, till the prayer be done. This will show that thou wouldest lift thy heart thither, if thou couldest, and will prevent many an impertinent distraction that comes in by the eye. If any deride thee for this, doubt thou not of good company. “Unto thee do I lift up my eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.” Psalm cxxiii. 1. Let your *ears* be shut to every thing besides your work. And the lifting up your craving *hands*, will not be unprofitable to this end ; for you will find them to flag when the heart flies off from its business, whereby you may be advertised to come in again. “Let us lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens.” Lam. iii. 41. And let your prayers be *vocal*, if it may be, for the voice both helps to fix the thoughts and raise the affections, the want whereof we discern in meditation.

In hearing of God’s word, let the *eye* be chained to the preacher with the greatest attention and reverence ; as if you saw an angel in the pulpit, or

Christ himself. And beware, lest your needless compliments to men be interrupted as a neglect of God. It is small manners to be complimenting the king's servants in his presence chamber, till you have done your homage to the king. Do your work with God ; it is time enough to perform your civilities to men, when that is done. Look then to God ; from him is thy expectation, with him is thy business. "The eyes of all them that were in the synagogue, were fastened on him." Luke iv. 20. And therein, also, let your *ears* be only open heavenward. Lord ! to deal with thee I am come, and thou shalt have all, both my soul and my body.

And here I cannot but digress a little, but it is to cure a more criminal digression, which is that frequent *abuse of whispering*, and talking to one another in the service of God, which, except it be upon such instant *indispensable* business, as cannot be ordered before or after the ordinance, is a sin in a high degree ; and that

1. Because it brings a *guilt and distraction* upon two persons at once. If a vain thought there be so evil as you have heard, how criminal then is this, that involves you both, yea perhaps occasions

sions a distraction to twenty more that observe you? And the guilt of all their vain thoughts on that occasion will be charged on your account according to the equity of that law. Exod. xxi. 23.

2. Because this hath more of *affront* in it. Thy heart testifies to God's face, that thou dost despise his presence. Who but an impudent *renegade* would, while the king is laying down terms of mercy and honour to him, be talking and laughing with his companions at some uncouth courtier that comes in? And who but a practical atheist shall be whispering with his neighbour about any thing, while the king of heaven and earth is treating with him about eternity? You hold it no piece of good manners, while any man is speaking to you, especially if he be your superior, to neglect him so far, as to turn from him to discourse with another ; nay, if the most necessary business call you away, you apologize for your absence, and crave pardon ; and shall you dare, while your Maker is in conference with you, to confront him with an open parley with others ? This is a high affront, if you consider it well.

3. This hath more *offence* in it. An offence to the preacher, that hath taken much pains to

prepare that, which you will not take pains to hear, or else imply, it is not worth the hearing. An offence to the congregation that sees it, who must needs, if they fear God, be troubled at so public a fault. An offence to the angels, that, while they stoop down to look into the mysteries opened in the church, see you slight them so openly. An offence to your own souls, that perhaps miss in that moment of what would most have done them good. O therefore, christian reader! mourn for thy misbehaviour in this way, and amend it for time to come, lest God refuse to treat with thee, that triflest thus in thy treating with him. Remember, it is work enough for a *poor man*, to converse with a *great God*. He needs no other business to fill his hands.

And then *in meditation* you must also compose your senses. There shut your *eye* and *ear*, and sequester yourself wholly to the contemplation of things invisible. The least sight or sound will here distract : any thing, however trifling, will throw us off the hinges in this duty. Indeed it is said of Isaac, “That he went forth in the field in the evening-tide to meditate.” Gen. xxiv. 63. And

in that kind of meditation, where the rise and subject matter is sensible, there the senses must be active and busy : but I think, in other cases, the outward senses may stand aside, and let the soul alone without them ; we are never more sensible than when we use no outward sense at all.

And lastly, *in communicating* at the Lord's table, fix both your eyes on the sacred elements, until the eye has affected the heart to feel what Christ felt, to die in his death ; and *looking* on him whom you have pierced, you mourn for him with a superlative sorrow ; and then look at those sacred signs with an eye of faith, till virtue come from that brazen serpent to cure your sin-stung soul. Look yet again, till thy heart be inflamed with love to him, till he cry in heaven : “Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my love, thou hast ravished my heart with one of thy eyes, with the chain about thy neck.” Cant. iv. 9. He that spends his eye there to observe his neighbours, and to criticise upon their gestures, hath little to do, and less to get in that sacred ordinance. And then lay a law upon thine ear, and taste and touch, for most of the senses are gratified and useful in this ordinance ; that nothing may interrupt thy

communion with Jesus Christ at that time. For there the utmost strength of body and soul are scarce enough to gain, and feel, and do, what is there to be gained, and felt, and done.

And in general, be not treacherous to yourselves. Satan *without you* can do no great matters *within you*; your senses you can command, your hearts not so well. Be faithful in what ye can, else if you could order your very hearts, you would not. He that will not do what he can, would much less do what he cannot.

SECT. VI.

REFLECTION AND EJACULATION.

THE sixth cure of these distractions is, a watchful reflection of the soul upon itself, and ejaculation unto God. It is said, “a wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart is at his left.” Eccles. x. 2. Is not this the meaning of it, that a wise good man hath his heart ready, it can speedily serve him, instantly recoil upon himself; but a wicked foolish man’s heart is awkward and unskil-

ful, a left-hand heart, unwieldy and unready for any good work. O get then a dexterousness of heart to bolt in, and break the sinful knot of your vain imaginations—that a distraction may not sit so long on the heart, that it hatch and breed yet more of the kind, and so swallow you up in condemnation. It is said, “When the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abraham drove them away,” Gen. xv. 11; not when they were sitting or feeding upon the carcases, but as soon as ever they alighted; we must not give place to them for a moment. Mr. Dodd adviseth us to ask ourselves often these two questions: 1. *What am I?* 2. *What am I doing?* We are well, if we can well answer these two questions. If thou canst answer, “I am a child of God,” and “I am doing God’s will,” it will stand thee in more stead than if thou couldest answer all the questions in Aquinas. We read that in the building of God’s house, “every one, with one of his hands, wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon:” Neh. iv. 27; work and watch, work and fight was the employment of them. And he that will edify in God’s house yet, must do the same; hear and watch, and watch

and pray, and fight and struggle, and pray still. This hill we climb inch by inch: one may tumble into hell, but the strait gate must be striven at. Let conscience then perform its part, and speedily glance into the heart with all fidelity. Abraham's fowls came without sending for, and yet would not go away without driving. You cannot hinder a thief from coming near the house, but you may from quartering with you, at least with any quiet and approbation.

And it is good to cast off these wandering thoughts with *an ejaculation* to God, else the destruction of one will prove the generation of another. When Satan casts in his *injaculations*, lift you up your *ejaculations*. This will engage divine strength, and make God your friend. Do as the Ephesians, when they thought Alexander would speak evil of Diana, "they cried, Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Acts xix. 34. So when these are injected, then breathe forth some heavenly ejaculations, so will you cross the tempter, and instead of losing, gain.* Send up thy prayer in a

* Cry unto God, Lord, wilt thou suffer thy slave to abuse thy child before thy face, while he is on his knees for a blessing? — *Dr. Harrison.*

parenthesis, like that, “ Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken me in thy way — Forsake me not, O God, my strength — And take not thy Holy Spirit from me — Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden.” These darting desires sent up with faith, will weaken the habits of corruption, and affright Satan from his suggestions. This resisting the devil will make him flee from you : as the golden spikes were set on the temple to keep the fowls from thence, so will these, being conscientiously used, keep off vain thoughts from lodging upon your sacrifices. Up therefore and stir up thyself, by this means to save thy sacrifice from being devoured, and thy soul polluted. Alas ! we are daily told, and we feel it, that the heart is deceitful above all things ; if a wary eye be not kept over it, you will find it sometimes in the bed of lust, sometimes on the pinnacle of honour, and often digging in the world, and yet salve up all with an “ I thank God, I am not as other men are.” If ever you be rid of these guests, you must do as good Barnabas advised the christians at Antioch, “ with full purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord.” Acts xi. 23. There must be heart, purpose

of heart, full purpose of heart, and then you will cleave unto the Lord.

Object. But I am suddenly fallen from God, before I was aware,* and when I see it, and resolve anew, yet ere five sentences be past I am gone again.

Answ. This shows the sad corruption of our nature, and should therefore humble us; and this argues also the contracted ill disposition of the soul; when a disease hath such revivals and returns, it speaks that it is too deeply rooted, yet in this case you must not give up, nor lay down your watchfulness; you must not compound with sin, because it is hard to sue out an *ejection*, no peace must be made with Amalek for ever. If the devil and your unregenerate part be unwearied in their assault against you, you must be unwearied in your resistance, and die in self defence. And you will find, as use and custom have strengthened these temptations, so an use of reflection and

* Neh. iv. 11. "And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them — and cause the work to cease." Thus Satan says, and on this principle he acts.

strenuous opposition, will at length weaken, and at last extinguish them.

SECT. VII.

STRENGTH OF GRACE.

THE last and great cure of distractions is strength of grace. As no props without will keep the ship steady, except there be a store of ballast within, so no external helps will establish your hearts against these wanderings, without grace, yea, strong grace within. “It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.” Heb. xiii. 19, for,

1. The more sanctifying grace you have, the *more mortified* will you heart be unto the world, and the flesh, the great disturbers of divine service. The fairest landscape shown to a dead man moves him not at all. A heart dead to the world, is not removed from God with every trifle of the world. “While we look not at the things that are seen, but at things that are not seen.” 2 Cor. iv. 18. Things visible are not worth looking at, especially

when things invisible are in place. What is a temporal house, or land, or children to me, that see, and am labouring for an eternal and glorious house and state? Alas! what taste is there in these rotten things?

2. The more grace, *the clearer* will be *your eye of faith*, to behold the majesty of God,* with whom you have to do, and the reality of the things about which you treat; for “faith is the evidence of things not seen,” and makes the soul as real as the body, and heaven as real as the world, and the day of judgement as real as the present day: and how undistractedly would a man pray, that saw the earth in flames, or himself dropping into another world?

3. The more grace, the more tender will be *your conscience*, and the sooner smart, and more oppose these enormities; the tender eye cannot bear what the harder hand can. A distraction in a duty more troubles a tender conscience, than the total omission of it doth another. A little sin, is no little sin, where there is a great deal of grace.

* Psalm xlvi. 9. “We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.” These are the thoughts of such as see by the eye of faith.

O keep your conscience tender, with all the care and skill you can employ. A little wedge makes way for a greater, and a little thief can let a greater in. Blessed is the man that feareth alway, and he that hath a soft heart is always hard to sin.

4. The more grace, the *more affections* to things above; “set your affections on things above,” Col. iii. 2, and where there is much affection, there is little distraction. A heavenly mind is all in all. Isaiah xxvi. 8, 9. When the desire of the soul is to the remembrance of God, when with thy whole soul thou hast desired him in the night, then *with thy spirit within thee*, thou wilt seek him early.* He that hath his usual conversation in heaven, will not easily have his heart from thence in prayer. It is a clear case, where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. A mind above, will not so easily have thoughts below. Where is the man who can say, “My soul breaketh for the longing it hath to thy judgements at all times.” Psalm cxix. 20. He whose

* If a man have store of gold and silver in his pocket, and but a few farthings, he will bring out gold more readily than farthings; so when there is much grace, much of heaven in the soul, your thoughts will savour of that.—*Cobbett.*

heart longs for the presence of God, will break his heart when he slips from him : and he that cries, O when shall I come and appear before God? will not privately wish, When shall I have done, and take leave of him?

5. The more grace, the *more disposed frame will the heart be in*, for the service of God. And it is indisposition to an ordinance, that lets in distractions there ; as an instrument out of tune hath divers jaring strings, and still one or other slips and spoils the melody ; a distraction is a string slipt that spoils the music, a tuned and disposed heart would prevent it much. The flock of sheep that is indisposed and unwilling to drive, start out of the way into every lane's end ; one this way, and another that ; and just so it is with an unwilling heart, one thought starts this way and another that, and it requires skill to drive them forward. O but a willing heart, a heart prepared and ready to every good work, flies upward, and delights itself in the Lord ; “the law of God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.” Psalm xxxvii. 31.

6. The more grace, the *more spiritual and invisible sins are observed* and resisted. Small grace discerns and mortifies the filthiness of the

flesh ; but strong grace sees and hates the filthiness of the spirit, and so perfects holiness in the fear of God. Gross sins are left at first, but more refined sins, spiritual wickedness in heavenly employments ; these are work for riper grace afterwards. Hence the strong christian can with ease avoid oppression, cruelty, uncleanness, drunkenness, and the like ; but the weak christian hardly conquers spiritual pride, passion, unbelief, distractions, and such like ; a little mote more troubles the eye, than much dirt molests the hand ; so a holy, tender heart is more troubled with these undiscerned sins, than another man with greater crimes.

7. The more grace, *the stronger resolutions* you will put on against them ; and resolution breaks the heart of them. The poor countryman going to his market, at every door in town almost there is a snare laid for him ; here one calls him in, and there another ; but he resolved in the morning not to spend a penny, and thereby he breaks through and avoids them all. Alas ! his whole week's earnings had gone at once, and he should have had nothing but repentance to feed on the week following. Even so, when thou comest into a holy ordinance, the soul's market, where

the soul hath much business ; here one thought stands and beckons, and there lies another, and at the door of every verse and sentence, a suggestion stands ; but if thou hast firmly resolved at the beginning of the duty, by God's grace, I will not stir from my God, from my work one tittle, thou wilt not heed nor exchange a word with these vain follies ; for alas ! if thou shouldest, the whole gain of thy duty would be eaten up, and the end of thy duty would be the beginning of thy grief.

8. The more grace, the *more business you will find you have to do with God* in his ordinances ; little grace hath little to do, and much grace hath much to do ; he hath always business with God, special earnest business. “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord,” — and why ? “to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.” Psalm xxvii. 4. O, I have somewhat to enquire after, I am to do something by this duty, and therefore cannot trifle. He that comes to visit a friend in a compliment, talks, walks, trifles, and goes home again ; but he that comes upon business is full of it. He is like Abraham’s honest and faithful servant ; “and there was meat set before him to eat,

but he said I will not eat till I have told mine errand." Gen. xxiv. 33. I have great business with the Lord, about the church, and about my soul, and I will not eat, nor talk, nor think, nor trifle, about any thing, till I have told mine errand, or heard my Maker's errand unto me ; and for this end, it is a rare thing to carry somewhat always on the spirit to spread before God, a heart full of some needful request, or matter whereof to treat with God. " My heart is inditing a good matter," and then " my tongue shall be like the pen of a ready writer." Psalm xlv. 1. O then I shall go merrily on in his service, when I have matter prepared in my heart. And indeed, as the mariner sees more new stars the further he sails, he loseth the sight of the old ones, and discovers new ; so the growing christian, the further he sails in religion, discovers new wants ; new scriptures affect him, new trials afflict him, new business he finds with God, and forgetting those things that are behind, he reacheth after those things that are before, and so finds every day new business with the Lord his God ; and he that is busy trifles not ; the more business, the less distractions. And therefore be advised all ye that intend for heaven, to

get more grace. It is as much your duty to get the second grace, as it was your duty to get the first grace; and as the want of this would damn you, so a want in that will displease God, and that is as bad.

Quest. But how should a poor weak christian get strong grace? If I can get any grace it is well for me, a little grace is much for him that had none at all.

Answ. Though thou art a poor weak christian, yet that strong and blessed God, whose thou art, "gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Isaiah xl. 29. And though it is well for thee to have any grace, yet it is better for thee to have more; few people are contented with merely living, but they would live well and comfortably, they would be healthful and plentiful; and will a little only of grace serve thy turn? And though a little grace be well for him that had none, yet it is not well for him that hath such means and motives for much grace, as thou hast. And therefore I renew my counsel, if ever you would attend upon God or enjoy him hereafter without distraction, strive for stronger grace; and to obtain it,

1. You must *be upright and humble*. Upright, for “he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.” Job xvii. 9. The healthy child grows; the child painted on the wall thrives not; so the sincere christian, though he feel it not, makes progress, and goes from strength to strength; but the hypocrite never grew, for he never had a root. And humble you must be; the humble vallies grow; God never thinks he lays out too much upon a humble heart.

2. You must *manage the means of growth with your whole strength*. Attend upon the most edifying ministry, read the most profitable books, consort with the most lively growing christians, and particularly be frequent in the trial of the state of your soul. Each week, if possible, call yourselves to some account, and strive to discern a weekly growth; but if you cannot, desist not from that work, but try again; single out some special grace, or duty, to thrive in next week; as for example, the grace of patience, saving knowledge, the duty of a husband, parent, or child. And still be trying; you will find one time or other, what will fully pay you for your labour; only observe, he that thrives in the world takes pains and care;

and so in grace, he that will grow, must strive and labour for it. A little grace is worth a great deal of pains.

And thus you have the *eighth point* : to wit, the *cure of distractions*, if you will apply it ; but to what end are rules, unless you will be ruled by them ? These helps cannot help you, except you now faithfully put them in practice. The antidote cures not in possession, but when applied to the disease. And your charge be it, if these do you no good. Review them, then, and resolve by divine grace to practice them every one, and *the Lord of heaven give his blessing*.

CHAPTER IX.

ENCOURAGEMENT UNDER THE BURDEN OF DISTRACTIONS.

SECTION I.

DISTRACTIONS ARE CONSISTENT WITH GRACE.

BUT lest any honest christian should by his frequent distractions be discouraged from his duties, or in his duties ; I shall, in the *ninth place* endeavour to prevent such a temptation by laying down some encouragements for those that groan under the burden of distractions. And I here assert two things.

1. That these distractions should not *drive you from your duties*. You have been thinking, perhaps, it were better my service were undone, than done so confusedly ; and our false hearts are secretly prone to accept any occasion to lay down

our work ; but believe not the devil's false divinity ; he takes on him to be tender, lest God's name be taken in vain, but this is to ensnare you the more ; but in this sense *obedience is better than sacrifice* ; thy obedience to his command is more pleasing to him than thy torn sacrifice. And then it is a known case, that the omission of a duty will never fit one for a duty better. *Luther's* saying herein was, The more I neglect, the more unfit I am. Indeed, some ground will mend by lying still, but that is better ground than is in fallen man's heart. Our's is the ground that must be stirred, and manured, and quickened, and then some fruit will come. As one sin fits the heart for another, so one duty fits the soul for another. However, it is better to serve thy master with a trembling hand than not at all ; and our Father takes well a well-intended work, though it be unwillingly marred in the making.

2. These distractions should not wholly *discourage you in the performance of your duties*. Displease you they must, discourage you they must not. Our good master would not have us draw heavily in his service. It is prophesied, "they shall sing in the ways of the Lord." Psalm

cxxxviii. 5. This is a sweet hearing. God's work goes on best, when we sing at it. All the infirmities of a christian laid together should not discourage him in his duty. And for your support, I lay down these encouragements.

1. *Distractions are consistent with grace.* Grace may live with them, but not be lively long with them. They are like the blue and yellow weeds, that grow with the best corn that is. Grace may live with them, though it can never agree with them ; and therefore conclude not against thyself, Oh ! I have no grace, I am so pestered with these things ; surely no child of God hath such a heart. For this is an epidemic distemper ; wherever the hand of God hath sown good seed, the enemy hath scattered these tares amongst it. Indeed there is no sin so crimson, that is absolutely inconsistent with grace, abate but that most awful one, *the sin against the Holy Ghost.* Let no profane heart make use hereof to encourage them in their sins : a profane heart, I say, for a gracious heart is of another temper. Alas ! the worst of sins do sometimes peep into the best men's hearts, yea, may creep into them and lodge in them for a season. How much more may a sudden thought break in,

which, like lightning, springs into the heart, without any warning? Do not therefore cry out, when this or any other corruption steals into your hearts, I am a lost man; this cannot consist with grace; but this should not consist with grace. The former conclusion being made, dejects the spirits; but the latter whets the spirit to amendment. It was foolishly done of Dinah "to rove about to see the daughters of the land," Gen. xxxiv. 1; it was not done like Jacob's daughter; but this was no argument for her to conclude, O, I am not Jacob's daughter. So thou hast a heart like Dinah, of a gadding temper, that runs abroad and comes defiled home; this is not done like a sanctified heart, but it were an unwise conclusion to draw hence. Certainly I am no child of God; I have no true grace at all. For, alas! the sweetest rose hath its prickles; the greatest wits have a spice of madness, and the sincerest heart hath some vanity in it.

SECT. II.

ENCOURAGEMENT, YOUR CASE IS NOT SINGULAR.

THE second encouragement is, that your case is not singular. Though the commonness of a plague make it not the better, or less mortal, yet it shows that I am not alone miserable : so, although this consideration make not the sin less heinous, yet it makes the affliction more tolerable. Poor soul ! thou art alone in thy complaints. Go to all the saints in an assembly, and they will each conclude, there is none hath a more giddy heart than he ; and there are few at the end of an ordinance would be pleased that the rest should know the particulars of their wandering. Though charity binds us in particular to hope better of every one than of ourselves, yet both God's word, and common experience tell us in general, that the imaginations of the thoughts of men are evil continually. And there are none think themselves so bad, but there are found others that would be glad to change hearts with them ; some indeed are nearer the cure

of this disease, and do watch more narrowly, and so have obtained more freedom than others, but yet all are tainted with this infirmity ; and every man being convicted by his own conscience, will go out of the congregation one by one, and there will not be a sinless man to cast a stone at thee.

SECT. III.

ENCOURAGEMENT, FROM THE UNINTERRUPTED INTERCESSION OF CHRIST.

THE third encouragement is, that Christ's intercession for thee is without distraction. There was fire always on the altar, though the sacrifices were intermittent. His intercession is continual, ours is interrupted. What unspeakable comfort may a poor, weak christian take in this, that Christ Jesus is every moment, I say, every moment, presenting to the Father the unanswerable argument of his passion, for obtaining pardon, and grace to help him in time of need ? Heb. iv. 15, 16 ; vi. 20. Poor sinner ! thou art sometimes so dead, that thou canst not pray to purpose, so guilty thou darest

hardly pray, and often so distracted, thou thinkest thy prayers stand for nothing; yet be not discouraged, thy Mediator is sick of none of these diseases. The holy psalmist was sometimes “so troubled that he could not speak,” Psalm lxxvii. 4; yet then had he one to speak for him. The sight of that precious glorified Son of God doth infinitely please and prevail with his Father for us, when we can hardly speak good sense for ourselves.

Object. But how can I tell that he intercedes for me?

Answ. 1. Hast thou a good word to speak for him to men? then hath he a good word to speak for thee to God.

And 2. Dost thou sigh, and groan, and speak for thyself as well as thou canst? his intercession is to help our weakness, not to excuse our laziness. If some ignorant poor man, that cannot tell his errand, but is often out in his business, has a cordial friend, that has the grace of speaking, and the favour to be heard, undertakes his business, he need not be discouraged; so, though you have much ado, and be often imperfect in your best resolved duties, yet you have a friend in court, that has the art of it, and the King’s ear beside, who ever liveth

to make intercession for you: and therefore do your best, and never be discouraged.

SECT. IV.

DISTRACTIONS MAY MAKE US HUMBLE.

THE fourth encouragement is, that distracted duties may keep you humble, whereas your perfect performances might make you proud. It is written of Knox, that on his death-bed, after he had received many blows from Satan about his sins, he was at last assaulted by him with this temptation, That surely God owed him a kindness for his upright and industrious labours, until that was strongly imprinted on him, “What hast thou which thou hast not received? 1 Cor. iv. 7. Perhaps the Lord foresaw that thy heart was ready to be inflated with pride, when thou doest well, and therefore he suffers these distractions, like *vultures*, to gnaw upon thy heart, to keep thee humble. Far be it from you to draw from hence an occasion to rest more securely in these sins. That *Knight* was surnamed *Fortunate*, because, being on a time

on the deck of a ship, a great wave came and took him off into the sea, and another wave took him and set him on the deck of another ship ; yet no man, I imagine, would, to obtain such a name, be content that a wave should so hazard him ; even so, though God do sometimes make use of our infirmities to do us good, yet let no man venture therefore to sin, that grace may abound. Because the *physician* can so temper poison, that it may do thee good, wilt thou therefore venture to drink poison ? It is miraculous wisdom in God to do thee good hereby, and it were miraculous folly in thee, therefore, to venture upon evil. And with this caution I proceed, and observe, that it is a very hard thing to hear, or pray exactly without some tinge of spiritual pride after it ; and to prevent this, God permits us to wander and lose ourselves, lest we should be lost ; he sees that it is safer for a man to fall into a lesser evil, when he can turn it to a greater good, than to attain a lesser good, and hazard to fall into a greater evil. O when a man sees so much impurity in his very best duties, such constant disappointments, such foolish impertinencies in his heart, yea, such wicked contrivancies in the very presence of God, O then

what a wretched man am I! Surely I am more brutish than any man, I am not worthy to come to thee, nor think I myself worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof, no such sinner on earth as I ; my best is very bad, etc.* Thus the soul is thoroughly humbled, and brought to sit among the chief of sinners, and spiritual pride rebuked.

SECT. V.

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GOD'S GRACIOUS ACCEPTANCE OF OUR SERVICES.

THE fifth encouragement is, that our God can gather some sense out of a distracted duty, and do us some good by it. “He that searcheth the heart, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit.” Rom. viii. 27; it is true of our spirit as well as of God’s. The great searcher of hearts knows what you came desirous of, what you meant, though you

* The worst prayers we make, to our sense, speed ever best, and then we pray most happily, when we rise most humbled. — *Dr. Harris.*

missed it in the delivery. He can tell you what was written in the letter, though it did miscarry, and will answer your holy meaning, and overlook your unwilling failing. “As a father pitieith his children, so the Lord”—Psalm ciii. 13. Why, the child comes sometimes full of a suit to the father, and he is quite out in his tale, has forgotten what he would have; but the father knows what he wants, and what he would have said, and grants the whole. And so, provided thou be a child, and art heartily sensible of thy wants, and comest panting to the throne of grace, thy heavenly Father will accept thy meaning, and grant thy petition, though thy heart did unwillingly give thee the slip, while thou mournest for it, and resolvest to mend it the next time.* The industrious scholar comes sometimes full and clear in his lesson, but when he is delivering it, he is confused. Now, if his master knows that he had it perfect before he came, he pities and helps him, and concludes that fear or

* A man that hath the palsy, his hand shakes, but we cannot say, he shakes his hand: so we may say, it is not they but sin in them, as it is not he, but the palsy distemper in him that shakes his hand.—*White.*

care made him miss it, and that his want is only in utterance, strokes him on the head, and bids him labour to do better next time. So the serious christian is deeply sensible of his spiritual wants, and knows and feels well what he must ask, and down he kneels ; but yet when he comes to open his case, alas ! he is drawn away utterly against his mind, and his heart runs at random. Why now, your heavenly Master knows your preparation, your intention, your endeavour, your grief, your resolution ; he will not turn off such a scholar. He is a father, and will make the best of his child's faults, especially seeing him falling out with himself for them.

SECT. VI.

GRACE AND STRENGTH IN CHRIST TO HELP AGAINST THEM.

THE sixth encouragement under the burden of distractions is, that there is grace and strength in Jesus Christ to help you against these your distractions. Without him we can do nothing to purpose ; but

that is a sweet word, and a true, “ I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.” Phil. iv. 13. There is a stock in Christ’s hand for such needy souls as you. You find your grace insufficient for you, but then his grace is sufficient. Rest then on his power and pity, and derive thence divine strength, to help your human weakness. How can that little cistern be empty, that lies with a conduit to the ocean? How can that wife be poor, whose husband is a prince? How can that body languish whose head hath plenty of spirits, and power to convey them? Why, he was anointed with the oil of grace above his fellows, but it was for his fellows. He was rich for the poor’s sake ; he was strong for the weak’s sake. “ Be thou therefore stong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Tim. ii. 1. Your wound is not incurable ; at this door others have succeeded, and so may you. Wrestle not therefore against these temptations only in your own strength. The devil is too strong for you alone, and the heart too deceitful. “ Not I, but the grace of God with me,” said Paul himself. If habitual grace be too weak for them, auxiliary grace is strong. Money in my friend’s purse, especially in my father’s, is as good as in my own, espe-

cially when it is there *for me*. There never was seen a Lazarus dying at this rich man's door for want. If there be any thing in heaven to please you that fear him, you shall not go without it.

SECT. VII.

THERE WILL BE NO DISTRACTIONS IN HEAVEN.

THE seventh encouragement is, that in heaven you will be perfectly rid of your distractions. There his servants serve him without wanderings. Here you *would* serve him, there you *shall* serve him. Here we have the world to cumber and draw us off, there will be no other world but heaven. Here the devil stands at our right hand to resist us, there he shall never come, nor once peep among the saints above. Here our flesh is continually suggesting evil motions, or crying, "Master, spare thyself;" but flesh and blood shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven, nor trouble us there. Here the crowding of friends distracts us in public, and the crying of children distracts us in private, but *supreme holiness* will be all the enjoyment in

heaven, and no cries were ever heard above. Here one untuneable voice distracts us in the psalm ; but there will be a perpetual unison, and the eternal hallelujah shall be sung without discord. Here this or that business calls us away, invades us in the middle and curtails us at the end ; but there is no other business to go to, no company to fetch you out, nothing that can give you such content, no nor any content out of that blessed employment. All the outward senses, and all the inward faculties, will be so wholly taken up with the vision and fruition of the ever-blessed Trinity, that there will not be room for one passing thought or glance from that fair object to all eternity. O run apace, and you will be shortly there, dispatch your work with all the speed you can, fly with a holy haste through all worldly business, cast anchor at no worldly comfort till you discover land, till your work be done, and your place in heaven be ready for you. And in the interim be not discouraged at your rovings, for you are not yet in heaven. Perfection is reward as well as duty, and so is our aim here but our attainment there. And let that happy state be a copy by which you write your present duties. Think sometimes when you are dull and

roving, you saw a casement open into heaven, and there beheld these celestial sacrifices, and their divine employment; and think withal, shortly shall I be among them, and do I pray here as I would sing yonder? doth this impertinent frame accord with yonder most blessed frame? “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? I shall yet praise him, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.” And this may be for encouragement to poor souls that are fainting under the burden of their distractions.

And now at last we see the shore, and so shall only lay on some binding sheaves, and drive away; and that will be by noting some inferences from this subject, which is the *tenth* and last point to be handled.

CHAPTER X.

INFERENCES FROM THIS DOCTRINE.

SECTION I.

WE HAVE CAUSE TO MOURN OVER OUR BEST DUTIES.

THE first inference from this doctrine and subject is, that we have cause to mourn over our best duties, and when we have written fairest, to throw dust thereon. Alas! what swarms of flies corrupt our pot of ointment, and what a savour do these leave thereupon in the nostrils of God? we can hardly ever be busy *within*, but vain thoughts send for us *without*. As our Lord Jesus could not be about his great work, but they came with this disturbance, “Yonder stand thy mother and brethren without, to speak with thee;” so it is with us; the devil and our hearts together, give us no quiet, when never so busy, but will molest and cry, “yon-

der is such a business to speak with thee," this iron burns, and that work must be ordered. Alas ! what broken and torn sacrifices do we bring to our God ? what a fair escape have we with our lives and senses out of the presence of God ? As that emperor killed the sentinel on the place, whom he found asleep ; saying, " Dead I found thee, and dead I leave thee." So most justly might the Lord answer our distracted duties, with distracting terrors, and leave us under the judgement of distraction, for our sins in distractions. And what a piece of ignorance and impudence is it, for any man to be proud of his duties ? Alas ! the best duties are of divers colours, like the beggar's coat ; and what beggar will be proud of his patched coat ? If there were any flowers or spices in thy duties, they were none of thine ; from thee came all the stench, from above came all the perfumes ; and what poor reason then hast thou to be proud ? It is sad, that when our sins make us humble, our duties should make us proud. " We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, for there is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." Isaiah lxiv. 6. With what shame and trouble would we go among people if we had

no better clothes than filthy rags? and yet how high we look, that have no better clothes of our own upon our souls? If you wear any better, they are borrowed garments, and what silly wretch is proud of borrowed garments?

And this shows likewise, what need we have of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, to make our prayers pass into the holy place. It was the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, and ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. Rev. viii. 4. The prayers of the saints themselves, are like smoke in God's eyes, to speak with reverence; but the smoke of the incense is a perfume in God's nostrils. Jesus Christ can be heard when we cannot. Our quaintest *oratory* is broken and ineffectual. His intercession is constant and imperatory. Go therefore to the throne of grace, leaning on your beloved. Keep an actual eye to Christ's mediation in your prayers, and though you bring in his precious name in the fag end of your supplication, yet remember you have need of him in every sentence; a broken prayer hath need of an entire mediator.

SECT. II.

OMISSION OF DUTY IS DANGEROUS.

It follows hence, that omissions of holy duties are extremely dangerous. Into these our fall is most frequent, against these our watch is most careless, after these our mourning is most easy ; yet of these the number is great, and the nature heinous. If according to that, “ He be cursed that doeth the work of the Lord negligently,” Jer. xlviij. 10, what is he that doth not God’s work, one way or other ? If a distraction in prayer may damn, O what may an omission of prayer do ! If the scholar be whipped that looks off his book, what will become of him that plays the truant ! Do the consciences of God’s children smite them for vain thoughts in a duty, how should your’s wound you that you have no thoughts of your duty ! O you that omit secret prayer, reading the Scripture, meditation, and such like, will your negligence pass with God ? He sees how seldom you sigh in secret ; what strangers you are to prayers and

tears. Should one in some cases refuse marriage for fear of distractions in God's service; and can you wholly omit his service without danger? Are watchfulness and seriousness such dispensable things, that they are happy that have them, but one may do well without them? I tell you, he that chastens his careless children, will punish his graceless servants. He that makes them smart for their distractions, will make you tremble for your omissions. Undone duty will undo your souls. It is not enough that you have left off the language of swearing, unless you have learnt the language of praying. It is not enough that you have burnt your books of curious arts, unless you love to read in the Book of books, the Scripture. To be mortified to contemplative wickedness is well, but till you be vivified to contemplative holiness, it is not well enough. Do you must, or die you shall. You may arrive at hell as certainly by not climbing up, as by running down; and lose heaven by neutrality, as well as by hostility. When you have read the 25th chapter of Matthew, you shall tell me whether wanting oil may not as truly ruin you, as drinking poison; whether an unprofitable servant will not come to a sad reckoning as

well as a prodigal son. Though you take not another's, yet you may be consumed for not giving your own; and in fine, you will find, that sins of omission do deserve damnation.

O hearken to this, all ye that live quietly, in the omission of closet or family prayer, of solemn fasting, or communion in the blessed supper of the Lord! Hath God abated you of the price that others must give? hath he granted a new way to heaven for you? must others make religion their business, and you neglect it where you please? What can your consciences answer to that, "If a man keep the whole law," mark, the whole law, "and yet offend (*Gr. stumble* and stop) in one point, he is guilty of all." James ii. 10. O beloved! there is a concatenation of truths and duties in religion; you may easier go away with all your work than some; a negative holiness will but bring you to a negative heaven, and you know behind heaven-door is hell. O awaken therefore your hearts, ye that stick at this point, that are far from debauchery and excess any way, but will not be gotten to positive duties. Will ye with one dash expunge the one half of scripture? Is not good as amiable, as evil is hateful? what cause is there to fear that your

avoidance of evil is from no good principle; but either fear, or shame, or interest, or at the best, a better temper? For the love or fear of God would make you cleave to that which is good, as well as abhor that which is evil, and to do God's will, as well as deny your own.

SECT. III.

THE GREAT NEED OF WATCHFULNESS.

SEE hence what great need we have of watchfulness; that most continual duty of a christian; this is the garment we must put on every day, especially in every duty. Between duties, that we may not want praying hearts; in duties, that we miss not prayer-blessings. Some duties bind always, but not to be always done, as prayer, hearing, meditation; but you can be safe nowhere without your watch, at all times, in all places, with all companies, yea, with no company, in all callings; there is a snare for the heart everywhere. Wherefore saith the prophet, "Wait on thy God continually." Hosea xii. 6; and the wise man, "Be thou

in the fear of the Lord all the day long ;" Prov. xxiii. 17, especially, but not only, in your morning and evening sacrifices. It is a true and sad observation, that many praying people are most devout and serious in God's service morning and evening ; but trace them all day long, hardly one word of God or heaven in their mouths, as if religion were hemmed up in times of worship ; nay, they are often most light and vain betwixt times ; but be thou *in* the fear of the Lord, involved, surrounded, and swallowed up in the sense and fear of God's glorious presence all the day long. This will dispose you to duties of worship. A watchful christian hath his heart ready at a call ; it is quickly in tune that was never out. Holy duties are not unwelcome to a holy heart ; the same frame will serve. He that walks with God, is never out of his way. A short, or rather no preface, will serve to usher in conference with him with whom you have been conversing all the day. It is sometimes the whole work of a prayer to become acquainted with God. Away with this strangeness ; if you will be upright, walk before God, and watch unto prayer. Methinks, sincerity and watchfulness are the catholic graces. Sincerity makes every grace

true, watchfulness makes every grace sure. Of all graces, study these catholic graces. Here is the essence, here is the quintessence of religion. O therefore prize this angelical, this evangelical grace, pray for it, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips ;” Psalm cxli. 3 ; for except the Lord do keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. Thou art impotent, God is omnipotent. And then practise it ; the use of it will teach the art of it; as children learn to go step by step, as they learn to swim by venturing. Adventure on this exercise, try one week, try one day, try one hour, try the next duty. As you renew your falls, still renew your vows ; you can do all things through Christ that will strengthen you. I beseech you, in Christ’s behalf, set on this duty in good earnest. You will pay me for all my pains with one well-grounded resolution to set up a constant watch. What a sad close will that be unto your life, to say, “My mother’s children made me a keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept ?” Cant. i. 6. O therefore watch and pray, or else temptation will enter into you, and you will fall into temptation.

And most especially in the service of God.* Watch and pray Christ hath joined together; and what Christ hath joined together, let no man, especially no good man, put asunder. What is the first step in an ordinance? as the orator of old asked in another case. Watchfulness. What is the second step in an ordinance? Watchfulness. What is the third step in an ordinance? Still watchfulness. Particularly,

First, *in prayer*. Prayer is a pouring out the heart unto the Lord; by a distraction you pour it aside. “My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him.” Psalm lxii. 5. A distraction imposes two masters on the soul to wait on. Rovings in prayer make that which is our most reasonable service, the most irrational thing in the world. No folly like speaking to one person, and thinking of another.

Secondly, *in hearing God's word*. This is the audible conference of the Almighty with thy soul. A distraction lets him talk unto the walls. When you come to a sermon, you “stand on your watch, and set yourself on the tower, and watch to see

* “Gird up the loins of your mind.” 1 Pet. i. 13. As loose clothes hinder a journey, so loose hearts hinder a duty.

what God will say to you." Hab. ii. 1. By a distraction you do almost, as if a servant stopped his ears at the orders that his master is giving.

Thirdly, *in reading*. Therein you peruse God's heart in black and white, where you may believe every letter to be written in blood, not like Draco's laws, but in bleeding love. A distraction neither understands nor applies those sacred characters. Which of you would so read your Father's last will, especially in matters that concerned yourselves? One chapter, one leaf, one verse, well read and applied, will do your heart more good than a hundred read with half a heart.

Fourthly, *in singing psalms* you had need to watch. Thereby you pay unto God the rent of his mercies. A distraction clips the coin, and turns the heart to do homage to the devil. Well resolved was it, therefore, of David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me praise his holy name." Psalm ciii. 1. Thy melody is *base*, if the *main* strength of the soul be not in it. I am persuaded that God has suffered this ordinance in particular to be slurred once and again, to be left off by some, and cast off by others, out of his just judgement, there being so general a neglect to

the inward and feeling management thereof. For where sits the man that lets each word and line in the psalms run through his heart as he sings them? Ney, if the truth were known, there is hardly one passage that is felt from the beginning to the end; for if it were, O the heavenly affections it would raise, and the sweet frame it would leave on the soul! You would not part with that ordinance out of your families nor congregations for all the world.

Fifthly, *in meditation*, great need of watchfulness; else when the soul is soaring aloft, like the eagle, these darts will, or ever you are aware, strike down the heart again. O how hard is it to spend a quarter of an hour in meditation without a distraction! If there be any thing in the fancy, if there be any thing in the room, if there be any thing in the world, thou wilt have it, to withdraw thy heart from God. And generally the more spiritual the duty, the more distractions. And therefore “I say unto you, watch.”

SECT. IV.

REASON TO BLESS GOD FOR FREEDOM FROM DISTRACTIONS.

SEE hence what cause you have to bless God for freedom from distractions, and be sure you do it. Those that have an habitual ability against these snares, O bless the Lord for it! it is he that keeps the heart in tune, not you. We, like little children, can break the strings, and put our hearts out of tune; but it is the Lord that sets and keeps us in order. You little know the anxiety, and fear, and trouble, that these cost many a poor christian; they strive, they moun, they doubt, they are ready to throw up all; these vultures do gnaw upon their very hearts; no comfort, no joy of the Holy Ghost, no peace within, and all through the continual assaults hereof. And by the mercy of God only, thou art well and free. Thou canst continue instant in prayer, thou canst come to heaven's gates, and get thy errand heard, thy business dispatched, and little distraction in it. O give the Lord praise,

lest he leave thee to thyself, and then thy case will be more miserable than theirs. Thankfulness keeps the mercy which ingratitude forfeits. And we are *freeholders* of these blessings ; but it is because we *hold of his free grace* and mercy.

Yea, those that are often pestered with them, and yet sometimes freed, bless the Lord for that. It is as much your duty to praise God when you are freed, as to bewail it when you have failed. It is the comparison of a good divine : if a man have planted many trees in his orchard, and the caterpillars or cankers have consumed them all but one or two, how glad will he be of them that are left, and make much of them ! the rest are killed, and these only remain. Even so thy duties of religion, which thou hast planted, and expectedst they should bring thee some good fruit ; but, alas ! these caterpillars have consumed them, unless it be here and there a prayer, here and there a sermon, that have escaped. O bless the Lord for these ! you have often prayed for such a mercy, now you have it ; let praises wear what prayers have won. It is sad to consider, what a beggarly spirit we are of : if we want any thing, heaven and earth shall ring for us ; but we are graves, wherein the gifts of

God are buried without any resurrection. Where is the heart that is pregnant with praises, that cries out to his friend, O help me to praise the Lord! Divide our lives, and the one half of them is made up of mercies, and the other half of sins; and yet divide our prayers, and hardly the tenth part is spent in praises. Alas! thanks is a tacit begging. Let God gain the glory, and thou shalt not lose the advantage. “The God of Israel is he that giveth strength to the people, blessed be God.” Psalm lxviii. 35. Conclude with the psalmist, “Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name give glory.” Think not, when thou hast attended on the Lord without distractions, I have acquitted myself well, but mercy hath acquitted itself well. He that justly pays his debt shall be trusted again.

SECT. V.

RELIGION IS AN INWARD, DIFFICULT, AND SERIOUS BUSINESS.

You see here in the last place, that religion is

an inward, a difficult, and a serious business. “He is not a Jew, that is one outwardly —— but he is a Jew, that is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God.” Rom. ii. 28, 29. To be watchful and holy within, that is a christian ; to have the vanities of the heart cut off, that is circumcision ; to carry it so in an ordinance, that you may be praised of God, that is religion ; while others are quarrelling about shadows in God’s ordinances, beware lest you lose the substance thereof.

There is in religion a *body* and a *soul*. The religion of the body, is but the body of religion ; the religion of the soul, is the soul of religion. And as the separation of the body and the soul is the death of a man, so the divorcing asunder the form and power of godliness is the death of godliness. As it is injury to macerate and destroy the body to cure and save the soul, so it is a crime to damn and lose the soul, to please and pamper the body. Even so it is injurious to destroy the body and outside of religion, to preserve and advance the soul and inside of religion ; but it is heinous to lose and break the heart of the inside and vitals of religion,

to pamper and adorn the exteriors thereof. It is well, if while we quarrel about a *bended knee*, we do not lose a *broken heart*.

And then you see here also, that religion is a difficult and serious business ; men cannot swim to heaven in a stream of rose-water, nor row up this river while they are asleep ; we cannot wrestle with our God, with our hands in our pockets, nor get the blessing without labour and tears. To repeat so many *paternosters* or *ave-marias*, with the heart on other things, and running sometimes from their knees to other business, in the midst of their devotion, as many do in the church of Rome ; or to say our prayers and be slumbering, or dressing us the while, as is the practice of many outside christians, is far from our religion. The *manner* of duties is *material* to the acceptation of them. Ah, stupid worldlings ! how can ye read those scriptures, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Matt. vii. 14. “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force, Matt. xi. 12, and such like texts, and yet hope for salvation in that secure and formal course you hold ? Do you imagine there are two ways to

heaven,—one for the diligent, mortified, and watchful christian, and another for the idle sluggard, or carnal worldling? Have the holiest saints much difficulty to walk with God, and get to him, that make it their grand business? They are saved, and that is all; and can you live and die well enough, that are neither mortified, nor watchful, nor diligent; that have no delight, but in your vanities? no skill, but in the world? no diligence, but for your base ends? What back-way have you found to heaven? what blind way have you descried to happiness? Awake, awake! look at the scripture, and then look at yourselves, and be convinced, that the only way to eternal happiness is to make Christ your choice, religion your business, the scriptures your rule, heaven your design, the saints your company, and the ordinances your delight; and in them, remember that you go to attend upon the Lord, and this must be done without distractions.

And now you know your duty and your danger. The end of speculation is practice, and the end of our preaching is not your approbation, but your submission. The christian religion is not so much the form of spiritual notions, as the power of

spiritual motions. He that compliments in God's service, will compliment his soul into hell. The outside of religion may bring you to the outside of heaven, but inside holiness will conduct you into the inside of happiness. If these directions I have given be but studied and applied, as you would study and apply a medicine for the gout, or stone, or but for the tooth-ache, I verily trust they will prove the destruction of your distractions ; but if they be neglected, your *distractions* will prove your *destruction*.

THE END.



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